

Portfolio**Section 1**

Play is vital for children as “Play is children’s work.” (Montessori, 1936). Piaget also stated that “Play is the work of childhood.” (Piaget 1954). It is through play children learn about themselves and the world around them (Diane E. Levin, Ph.D., 2020). Self-directed play is important because children experience how to work out problems for themselves and learn how to take healthy risks that they can judge for themselves. They also get to figure out ways to think about the world and how it works, based on their own self-knowledge gained from engaging in self-directed play (Froebel, date unknown). From engaging in this type of play children also learn skills such as overcoming obstacles in creative ways to problem solve either on their own or with other children. Self-directed play can when children collaborate help social skills and the ability to take turns. Self-directed play is child driven. Play is vital as children can choose their own rules and how to play the game and this is vital in acquiring life skills and problem-solving techniques. It can take place within all forms of play.

In the portfolio the first section will focus on three categories of play which include constructive play, expressive and fantasy/dramatic play.

Constructive play – This is a type of play that helps children engaged in creating objects using different mediums and materials. This will increase in complexity the older they become. It teaches children to connect and understand and helps them with problem solving when it comes to play. This is also an important part of the early year’s environment. A large part of constructive play is the use of the three-dimensional materials such as blocks, play dough and recycled materials but with these you let the children decide how to use them and what they want to make with them and this is what you call self-directed play (Alka Burman, 2013).

Expressive play – There are many benefits to expressive play which include how children develop relationships with each other and adults and also with their toys. It enables their imagination to grow when the child creates stories and characters. It helps to introduce expressive dialogue and enhances language development which

aid the child in all areas of development to communicate with their peers and the adults around them. Expressive play is a way for children to communicate. For example:

- Timid children can be brave superheroes.
- Tough children would not be afraid of letting their sensitive side come through.

This could create a new personality and new opportunities to help children express themselves (Jona K. Anderson-McNamee, MSU Extension Family and Consumer Science Agent, Cascade County, and Sandra J. Bailey, Family and Human Development Specialist, MSU, 2010).

Fantasy/Dramatic play – This type of play is important in developing a child's imagination. They can be who they want or even be whatever they want. In this way they are self – directing their own play. There are many other benefits which include the following:

- Children feel powerful.
- Use of social interaction skills.
- Language development.
- Use of symbols.
- Sort out fantasy and reality.
- Relief from emotional tension.

All this could make hours of endless fun and learning without adult intervention. It could take place outdoors or inside. It is from all these opportunities of play where the children engage in self-directed play that holistic play is able to flourish (Sarah Punkoney, 2015).

The role of the adult is vital in allowing children access to the many different forms of play. This is concerned with providing the right space and the appropriate materials and the time. By the appropriate materials for example toys, blocks, dress up clothes and boxes, all these will ignite the imagination of the child. In doing this the adults can observe the play and when invited by the child they can join in. The role of the adult in children's play can be categorized into certain section. This includes the following.

- Planning for play – Paying attention to environment and structure. – Building and extending. – Providing.
- Supporting play – Talking about play. – Validating their efforts. – Adding to children's play. – Preventing problems. – Building children up.

- Reviewing play – Checking in. – Observing the space. – Thinking critically. – Making plans. (Clare Caro,2012).

There is an excellent pneumonic given by Anna Housley (2015) in Pop-Up Adventure Play for the role of the adult in supporting play and enabling self-directed play to take place. It is vital for any young childcare practitioner to allow this to take place in order children can develop holistically and reach their full potential. It is as follows:

Permission - To support child-directed play, give children permission by making sure they have downtime every day – time with no adult-directed activities. Some children may need encouragement, “It’s okay. Just play!”

Loose Parts - Loose parts are simple, everyday materials that children can change and use as they please (e.g., cardboard boxes, paper towel tubes, paper bags, crayons, fabric sample, etc.). Just add tape or glue and kids will do the rest!

A Safe Space - Children need a place where they feel safe to play freely and get messy! An old sheet or towel on the floor can help to create a safe space inside where children can play and create with tape, glue, and crayons. Draped across chairs, the sheet makes a place to hide. If possible, you can bring materials outside to a porch or the playground.

You - Children are experts in their own play. One of the ways to support play is to simply watch and listen. When invited, play along! If children ask for help (e.g., cutting a window in a cardboard box), lend a hand! By showing that you support their play without taking over, you offer your children a priceless gift.

(Housley, A. 2015)

Section 2

What is risky play? It is described as an exciting and a thrilling with a small factor of risk taking involved. The risk being playing with a chance of physical injury. There have been studies that show there are two types of risky play which is environmental characteristics (features of the play environment) and individual characteristics (how the play was carried out by the child). With the two different types of play there are several different risk characteristics that identify the risk in risky play (Sandseter, E. 2009).

Risky play is important to a child's development and life skills. Some of them skills are building resilience and persistence in acquiring the skills of balance and coordination combined with the awareness of the capabilities and limits of their own bodies. The ability to asses and makes judgments about risk is important in a child's development as they learn about the world around them. Handling tools safely and with purpose and understanding consequence to their actions is important. This risky play teaches children confidence and independence (Lauren, G. 2016).

The benefits of risky play cannot be underestimated every child need and wants to take different risks to find out the boundaries so they can investigate and venture into new experiences. This will also help with their development from birth to their first play encounter. Unless the child is motivated by the adult they will never walk, talk, climb or take the plunge to do anything involving risk in case of injuring themselves (Melanie Pilcher, 2020).

"The Play Forum's Position Statement is focused more on play equipment and playgrounds, but the message is relevant to children's play in a much broader context too. Play and risk go together. If we are to truly value play, then we must also value risk." (Melanie Pilcher, 2020).

A child will not set out to go and intentionally hurt themselves or cause themselves any pain, but as a child they will not always realise their limits or the limitations of the atmosphere that is around them. There will be times when they must make certain choices about what is safe to attempt and what is not.

Whilst there is quite rightly much emphasis on safeguarding children in early years settings, we must be confident in our own competence and 'take a risk ourselves' (Melanie Pilcher. 2020).

All babies, children and young people have the power to have equal need and right to take risks and with taking these risks they will realise the benefits. This is supported by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. (Risk in play and learning, 2017).

All the involvement to do with risky play gives a child the chance to access different risks and manage different situations. Children from a young age start taking risks, which will then lead to them learning new experiences. Each activity they take part in involves a few risks, but these risks are essential for a child's development. Risky play let children expand their boundaries and learn different life skills. Achievement and failure can give a child the motivation to keep trying over and over and come up with different ways of doing things to achieve the right outcome. When it comes to different activities that are regularly linked to risky play such as activities including swinging, climbing, rolling, hanging, sliding they are not only fun for children but also necessary for their motor skills, balance, coordination, and body awareness. Children who do not take part in these certain movements are likely to be clumsier, also they may feel uncomfortable in their own bodies, will also have poor balance and be afraid of movement. The role of an adult and teacher is to build a play atmosphere where children can take part in movements that satisfy their physical needs (Utiskoli,2015).

“This is a quote that is a story from a Mr. Kennedy who explains a personal encounter he had when as a child he faced risk and challenge. **“After climbing through a weathered window and up onto the ledge of a wooden A-frame play structure in the backyard, I took a moment to adjusted my ingenious (but highly ineffective) grocery bag parachute snugly against my shoulders. The mere 7' drop was no different to my eight year old mind and eyes than that of a fifty foot drop. Noticeably cautious, a few encouraging shouts from below were necessary to help build sufficient courage to make the leap. The plastic grocery bag flapped loudly as the ground approached...much more rapidly than expected! After all, the parachute should have slowed me down right? I lived to tell the tale and vividly remember making that leap many more times. Unbeknownst to me at the time, these types of risks, and others, during my play time as a youth were the ultimate training for risk management as an adult. Modern research has revealed this to be the case in most situations along with many other benefits that risky play has on ALL children's development. Risky play is universal and observed in all demographics of children filling an innate developmental need not met any other way. The essence of risky play is a child's attempt to manage perceived danger in an environment with the reward of excitement, achievement and exhilaration. “”** (Ken Kutska, 2013).

Section 3

The observation method chosen for young children for this section of the portfolio is the Schedule of Growing Skills (SOGS). In young children the early identification of any developmental problems is vitally important in order more in depth assessment can be carried out after using the SOGS. SOGS is therefore an assessment tool that is widely used by all practitioners working in early years.

SOGS which is a vital tool that practitioners employ to identify the developmental levels of a child. When the child is between birth and 5 years old an individual assessment can be used allowing practitioners to evaluate the children when suitable and appropriate (GI-assessment, 2017).

SOGS not only highlights the areas of strength of any child from birth to 5 years but also any potential delay. As an assessment tool it is easy to use and is judged and compared to norms for the age of the child. It is therefore a platform for discussion with parents and other professionals working in early years. It gives an easy to read graphical picture of the child's development. The administration of the screening tool is straight forward and the instructions for scoring and understanding the results is simple. This enables the user to give results and feedback within half an hour (AAP, 2006).

SOGS is a universal assessment tool and therefore all the data from the screening is presented and scored in a reliable and consistent manner. As stated before it is quick and easy to use and very inexpensive. There were problems with the scoring but these are being eradicated by the introduction of the SGOS Part 2. The initial problems were concerned with the fact one could not compare between groups of children or across time. This modification in the SGOS allows now for better accuracy. The then Welsh Assembly Government chose to use this assessment tool when it rolled out the Flying Start scheme in 2007. It is employed by the American Academy for Paediatrics (AAP, 2006).

SOGS is administered individually and covers nine important areas of a child's development. This gives a reliable 'snapshot' highlighting any areas of concern but

also the strong areas of development. It was developed from the Standard Test for Young Children and Retardates (STYCAR) which was developed by Mary Sheridan in 1969. These areas include the following Passive posture, active posture, hearing and language, speech and language, locomotor, visual, interactive and social, self-care social and lastly manipulative. When it comes to observing children's play it is a chance for the observer to gather important information. With that it provides different information about the child in respect of them as individual. Observations are a part of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) assessment and planning cycle. It is a great instrument to use as a foundation for reflection (Gov.uk, Date unknown). Working in a childcare setting observation of children's play is a big part of the practitioner's responsibility. It's the managers responsibility to make sure the practitioners are confident when observing and understand the purpose of them. When it comes to observing children's, play is about standing back and watching what is happening it also depends on what type of observation the practitioners are using that will determine the purpose of the observation. Many childcare settings follow the simple rule which is LOOK, LISTEN AND NOTE but by remembering this simple rule it will help provide you with the certain answers that practitioners are looking for in the observation (Kelly,2016).

SOGS allows the observer to assess reaction while the child is playing. It uses colourful and engaging toys. These include dolls, pegs and building blocks. So, this screening allows the child to feel that it is playtime. SOGS then asks parents to observe their child to complete the screening. SOGS observation forms enables four assessments of a child. This gives a clear set of results over time and with its easy scoring it is simple to highlight any developmental delays which may need interventions (AAP, 2006).

Section 4

When Establishing an understanding of observation in the role of play it shouldn't affect the child that's why it called observation. The child shouldn't be aware that you're watching and observing them.

When practitioners observe children and then take an active role in what the children are doing, the children then are aware that they are there so they may act differently.

If the practitioners take a step back during the time of play, they will be able to see what the children are capable of and where the children would need help to help along their development. Its also stated that if these observations are done on a regular basis in a child's play setting the children will be comfortable with the practitioners around them, for them not to notice the practitioners observing them. This would have the result of the children not being distracted while playing so won't be aware on what's happening around them (Welsh Assembly Government, date unknown).

A few practitioners have come up with different ways of observing and evaluating children and then with what they have gather by doing this, they will use the information to help with future planning for one to one sitting with the children or in group settings. When the practitioner is observing the child its important for them to know when its suitable to step in and talk to the child or aske the child questions, but they also have to know when to step back and let the child carrying on with what they are doing without interrupting them. With the value of questioning that is being carried out it is critical to the child in the way of them becoming independent thinker and to also extend their way of learning. When it comes to asking certain question only some allow children to remember information or explain their understanding when I come to more thought triggering and stimulating questions which will allow children to reason and develop their own results and answers to the questions (Welsh Assembly Government, date unknown).

There are two main types of questioning to be had:

Closed questions - Which have a specific aim that normally only allows for one accurate answer. These closed questions are useful in discovering what children have understood. For example, by telling them a story: persuading a child that's got hardly no confidence to give short answers to help build the confidences while in big groups for children. It also a small introduction in to extended conversation.

Open questions – these types of questions have a tendency to be short or even just one word. For example: Who? What? How? When? Where? Why? This will give children a opportunity to take a minute to think and then talk about a number of opportunities and come up with solutions to move forward.

The following case studies show that even the most experienced practitioners will often have extremely unexpected answers to their questions.

As practitioners when should we interfere? The most obvious reasons are when they need help or if they are struggling with a task because the children could get frustrated if they don't receive the support needed at that time. If a child's life is at risk because there is a health and safety, but the most important is when the children invite you to be included (Welsh Assembly Government, date unknown).

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