

ECEY4003
Children's play Principles and Practice

Section 1

Play in its many forms is significant for children's development and has many holistic benefits. As early years practitioners it is important to understand the concepts of play types and how these can help children thrive. According to Brown (2014) Play that is freely chosen, intrinsically motivated and personally directed offers new and challenging alternatives as well as helping develop the child as a whole. Gascoyne (2018) states that Messy play is an important form of learning and development for children. Messy Material engagements are key to early years, and it is vital that play opportunities are provided throughout continuous provisions. The curiosity, awe and wonder that messy play activities provide to children is a key aspect to their learning. The materials used do not always have to be super messy resources for example gloop and mud instead they focus more on the child's material engagements, thinking and need for immersion.

Messy play can develop children's sensory awareness including helping them become more inquisitive about the world around them. It is argued that play is exciting, providing endless possibilities that can be enriching, captivating, and satisfying. For children with sensory processing difficulties, messy play in different forms can be seen as interesting and engaging which with practitioner encouragement can provide great opportunities for their sensory and cognitive development.

Furthermore Gascoyne (2018) argues the importance of early years practitioners understanding the importance of messy play its key benefits, including how individually practitioners can supply enriching learning opportunities, adapt environments and support and encourage each and every child within their early years provisions.

Messy play experiences are infinitely varied but are argued to be shaped by the physical and emotional environments, the adult's approach, the individual child's curiosity and the quality of child and adult rapport.

Early years practitioners encouraging children to explore messy play is key for positively developing their holistic learning. By both providing the opportunities and resources needed for messy play to be successful alongside being open to getting actively involved in the activities set helps to encourage children to play themselves, overcoming nerves and in result being more willing to explore new experiences. Messy play is key to developing and shaping the child as a whole. Consequently, messy play also provides many opportunities for learning physically, emotionally, psychologically, and cognitive.

Risky play is an invaluable part of childhood. Research shows that it not only positively increases children's physical skills but also motivates and teaches them about their own individual limits. Further leading them to learning how to deal with risks in the future. It is argued that taking risks in childhood can have many positive effects with regards to children's development, social and emotional needs as well as their overall health. Risky play helps equip children to deal with situations in later

life and by providing opportunities where risks are managed in a controlled environment it helps to build confidence. According to Gill (2007) denying children this opportunity could potentially result in a society of risk averse citizens who are unable to cope with everyday situations and may lead children to simply finding more dangerous locations to carry out their risk-taking behaviour.

Risky play within childcare settings help develop children's holistic development. Children beginning to take risks and understand the consequences of these risks help to build cognitive skills. Dr Emmi Pikler designed and created the concept of the Pikler Triange which promotes independent play and gross motor skills. Children may use apparatus such as the Pikler Triangle to undertake risky play where they may push their physical skills. Risky play gives children the opportunities which can lead to new learning experiences such as walking, running, climbing, and riding a bike. All of these activities involve some risks but are argued to be a necessity for development.

Both success and failure provide children with the motivation to try again in order to reach their goals, without risky play children may not be encouraged to want to achieve more due to feelings of nervousness and being overwhelmed by risk taking. These feelings can potentially have long term effects as children that do not undertake risky play may take these fears into situations in later life. Furthermore, it is important for childcare practitioners to understand that each child has their own risk limits, and it is vital that play is self-directed.

Section 2

Self-directed play is key to children's growth and development. it involves children following their own individual interests with regards to resources, experimenting and creating their own ideas of what play and learning means to them. It is also argued to be a central aspect of curriculum. According to McInnes (2011) play is considered as fundamental to early years, children's development, and education. It is argued to be a central aspect of curriculum and underpins educational guidance across the United Kingdom.

As early years practitioners understanding the links between play and learning and how positive adult intervention can support children is vital. McInnes (2013) suggest that there are strong reasons to believe adult presence can enable good learning opportunities. Within childcare settings practitioners use a variety of adult led and child led activities where adults interact is apparent in many ways. Following studies undertaken by Vygosky (1976) there has become a greater emphasis on the role of the adult within early years and he argues that adult involvement in play has been increasing steadily however some may argue that the quality of this involvement is questionable in some respects and is based more on managing and monitoring rather than supporting development. This is due to some childcare practitioners and teachers not being comfortable with play and child led activities, placing adult led activities as more important for their developmental outcomes and teaching, according to McInnes (2013).

Adult interventions with regards to self-directed play can be apparent in many different forms and needs to be catered to each individual child and how they want to learn. These interactions whether they are verbal communication forms or practitioners joining in physically with what the activities are all part of supporting their learning and development. the types of language used during adult

interventions can effectively facilitate understanding therefore it is good practice to use open ended question techniques.

When discussing children play, McInnes (2013) states the importance of play and how it is central to both teaching and learning. Play itself and especially when a child argues that they are 'playing' differs between each and everyone. The term being difficult to define alongside adults traditionally preserving it as an observable play act rather than basing it on the child's perspective has results in many different viewpoints. Past studies have shown that children may find adult interventions negative, this is because with an adult's presence they may be less likely to define and approach an activity as play. This means that how an adult involves themselves within self-directed play is fundamental to how children define what play is. Adults being aware of their effect and the different styles of adult – child interactions need to be developed in order to construct a play-based curriculum which maximises playfulness and learning.

The role and responsibility of the adult in play within early years often changes between communicator, caregiver, observer, and facilitator. It is important to listen to the child where trust can be ultimately developed in order to overcome difficulties and build meaningful relationships. Sometimes a practitioner's role is to sit back and observe children during play, however, other times they are argued to be co players who model skills and encourage positive interactions. Practitioners can also be seen to be further directing play to focus on specific developmental and learning opportunities and outcomes. As childcare practitioners it is good practice to seek to support children that may have difficulties with self-directed play, by giving suggestions, demonstrations and communicating efficiently with the child about their interests. Amin (2022) states adults being good role models forms a good base for strong rapports where children feel confident to explore independently and learn within their environment. Resulting in inspiring them to undergo self-directed play, enjoy exploring their environment and make positive progress with their learning.

Adults play a crucial role in play and providing opportunities for children to develop their play skills. Having well planned, varied learning is key and undergoing a balance of child led and adult led activities is important for their holistic development. Learning and play opportunities should reflect a playful approach and imaginative, hands-on resources should be available for children to make choices and express their own ideas with regards to play. Furthermore, leaving adult led activities set encourages children to further practice and expand their skill sets alongside using their play skills which in result reinforces learning. For play to be successful children must themselves understand that play means to them and how it differs from some adult led learning opportunities. Understanding the differences of these set learning activities and what is regarded as self-directed play enables adults to form a good knowledge and skill set that they are able to adapt to each individual child and their learning.

Section 3

In Wales the foundation phase profiles are a form of observing and assessing children. They begin at 6 months and are a good tool to track children's development. It is argued to be a good assessment tool that uses both observations and formative assessments to build a holistic picture of the child as a whole. Observations play a key role in early years settings and practitioners should have regular training on this. It is important that the settings have the correct resources and opportunities so that effective observations can take place. Observing children through the foundation phase helps to build a picture of both how the child is developing through spontaneous observations where practitioners can observe based on interests what the child is capable of and with the formal assessments It helps build a bigger picture of where stereotypically the child should be developmental wise and provides a good base for practitioners to build and change activities and provide support when needed. Waters (2016) argues that children learn through first hand experimental activities with 'play' being central alongside experiences built from the foundation phase framework. Whereby children are able to consolidate their learning, experiment, take risks, problem solve and make individual decisions which gives great opportunities for observations to take place.

Every observation method within early years has its strengths and weaknesses. It is important as childcare practitioners to tailor which method suits the child and the practitioners best to ensure that the best outcomes are being reached.

According to Gov.uk compact profiles provide a snapshot of a child's development alongside the baseline assessment. It allows practitioners to produce single outcomes which focuses on each area of learning. These profiles provide ways practitioners are able to set targets based on specific weaknesses in set areas as well as supported by the framework guidance helps to understand where each child is holistically so that support can be put into place if required. The foundation phase profiles are used consistently in early years settings across Wales, with it beginning from 6 months continuing up to the age of seven it is a consistent way of tracking each child's development where all settings follow the same guidance it means that as the child grows and ultimately moves settings the frameworks will still be the same. According to Gov.uk The foundation phase profile is completed in schools six weeks after the child starts nursery. This gives the child time to settle into their new setting and form rapport therefore when the observations are taken place it can be argued to be more of an accurate representation. Furthermore, with the profiles being standardised it provides practitioners with many goal opportunities and targets which can be created and adapted to each child. However, it is crucial to consider its weaknesses alongside. Some practitioners suggest that the profiles do not consider any additional needs with the targets being set from the framework there may be little room for change.

It is argued that six weeks may not be long enough for practitioners to get an accurate representation of the child to then observe them. It takes time to create bonds and get to know each child, it is important that they feel comfortable and safe in their environment for them to be able to flourish both academically and holistically. Every child is different, and some may take longer to settle than others so timing of the initial observations could potentially be incorrect, when the initial foundation phase profile is undertaken at six weeks and the child is not fully settled it could lead

onto them not achieving the outcomes that they are able to do which therefore doesn't give an accurate representation of where the child is at developmentally. Furthermore, the profiles have to be undertaken properly and early years practitioners need time to observe each child individually and time to write up what they have observed and set appropriate targets. In some early years settings including schools having set time out to observe is limited which could potentially mean that profiles are rushed and not accurate. Adding to that in schools there are large classes and limited staff so making these initial bonds with children may be harder and a longer process due to time restraints so with regards to the assessment profiles they will not give an accurate representation as practitioners may not know the child enough further meaning that it is not a true reflection of the child and their capabilities. With that in mind the outcomes of the foundation phase profiles only have to be achieved once therefore not giving a true reflection, this can be seen to be the same if the child does not achieve the outcomes for their age bracket. A child that may not feel comfortable in their surroundings may not want to participate in the activity and according to the profiles that means they did not achieve. It is important to consider the environment and how this may affect the outcomes for the child.

Section 4

According to Smidt (2005) observations are argued to be the best tool as practitioners we have to understand when, if and how children learn. By taking different forms of observations in early years it enables practitioners to gather evidence that helps children to progress. Undertaking training on observation and planning is vital for teaching assistants, nursery nurses and teachers and is a key part of daily practice. There are many different methods that observations can be carried out using different tools and resources therefore it is important to cater them to each individual child and the environment it is taking place in, this is so that the best results can be created.

When undertaking any form of observation within early years it is crucial that the equipment and resources are always purposeful with links to outcomes stated in the curriculums. The foundation phase framework in Wales encourages children to be more creative and imaginative with their learning to in result better outcomes. The continuous provision within the framework helps practitioners to build their learning environments for children to support them with their development and play.

Resources and learning opportunities should be accessible to children at all times so they have opportunities to explore freely, this enables self-directed play. The importance of the environments being inviting, innovative, fun and plentiful is key to the success of children's independent learning and development.

According to Wainwright et al (2021) the distinction children make between what they regard as play and work is of significant importance. This is because children that undertake tasks in play-based practice conditions are more likely to show superior performance with regards to their holistic development and learning, compared to when children undertake tasks in a formal learning environment. The true notion of playful practice enables children to learn in a way that they perceive as play where they are in return more likely to maintain motivation and engagement. Observing children during play has many benefits and argues to give a more accurate representation of where the child is developmentally and what goals

and targets need to be put in place. Play opportunities are clearly evident in the foundation phase where the use of both indoor and outdoor opportunities are readily available to all children making observations more varied.

McInnes (2011) argues that there are clear links between children's play and their emotional wellbeing. Children being able to freely play and express themselves in their environment enables them to develop holistically leading them to achieving better with regards to their learning, giving more of an accurate representation of where they are with their development. Children being able to play positively impacts their lives in many ways including directly contributing to their happiness and wellbeing.

Play can be seen to be an observable type of behaviour but for play to be regarded as play it has to be understood by the player which is what differs it from other types of behaviour. Children use cues within their environment which decide whether they feel that what they are doing is play or learning. Early years practitioners should be aware of the types of cues and ultimately ensure that each child in the environment is able to enhance play. Adults within early years should consider children's views on play when planning activities based, this is so that learning can be tailored correctly. Training and opportunities for professional development should be undertaken by practitioners with the emphasis on the importance of play and how environments can be equipped to support this. Practitioners should also have the right skill set in order to effectively reflect on the experiences children within their care have.

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