

Play Therapy UK (PTUK) defines play as "A Physical or mental leisure activity that is undertaken purely for enjoyment or amusement and has no other *objective*". The Merriam-Webster Dictionary states planning as "The act or process of making or carrying out plans; specifically: the establishment of goals, policies, and procedures for a social or economic unit".

This assignment will examine how crucial planning is in the organisation of play in the nursery. it will *begin by* investigating the planning framework and follow this I will *describe* numerous features of play.

The length of long-term plans *varies incredibly*. Some settings view a long term plan as *over six weeks*; whilst in school settings it usually refers to a full academic year's work. Long-term plans should outline how curriculum is to *be* delivered and the themes need to *be* considered that are to *be* used over the period. Long term planning (*overview/vision*) should *link* into the whole school curriculum plan and identify the learning opportunities offered *by* each activity area. They also identify how the area will cater for the differing needs and *abilities* of children and state how adults might interact with children in areas to *extend/deepen knowledge skills* understanding. It identifies the *link* with the National Curriculum *subjects* and SCAA areas of learning – learning outcomes and includes transition arrangements and home visiting arrangements – in *broad terms*

Medium-term plans are in some settings called curriculum plans. The length of a medium term plan depends on the long-term plan. In some schools a medium term plan shows coverage for half a term, whilst in some pre-school settings it shows coverage for half a term, whilst shows coverage for a fortnight or month. Medium term planning (*termly half termly*) should include the topic or focus for the term or half term and specific learning opportunities to *be* provided in particular areas (related to Desirable Outcomes and Programmes of Study for the National Curriculum where appropriate). Resources are needed and visits, Visitors, new children all can help with the displays.

Short term planning falls into two categories:

- **Curriculum centred** planning which breaks down medium term plans into weekly units and is further broken down into daily plans. These should give an indication of what the adults are going to be doing, with whom, when and where.
- **Child centred** planning, which is informed by interaction with and observation of the children and deciding what's coming next.

Play is a fundamental mode of interaction within the world for children and is described as an activity with no goal other than the enjoyment derived from it. It is, both to and for the child, the most important and serious activity. Opportunities to play with adults, as well as other children, are important to children. Play is an essential means of exploring, expanding and representing experiences. Through play children learn skills, gain concepts and understanding and draw relationships between concepts. They are able to practice problem solving and decision-making, and learn how to successfully interact with other children and adults. Play is the most powerful way that children learn.

Play enables children to strengthen their body, improve their mind and develop their personality. The adult has an important role in providing an interesting, safe and suitable play environment for the child. There should be adequate space for the child to be able to manipulate age-appropriate play equipment. Play develops in stages, as children develop socially from solitary play (playing alone), to parallel play (alongside other children), to associate play (watching and copying other children) and finally to co-operative play (playing with other children).

There are many different types of play. They can be broadly described as:

- Free-flow play
- Structured play
- Spontaneous play

Free flow play is described by Tina Bruce (1991) as the only true concept of play. It is often referred to as imaginative, pretend or ludic play – it allows children to learn by discovery. Bruce (1991) states 'Games help children understand external pressures and constraints; free-flow play helps children to see the function of rules themselves'. Bruce illustrates her definition of free-flow play as follows:

Wallowing in ideas, feelings and relationships

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Application of competence and technical prowess that has already been developed.

Tina Bruce's twelve features of free-flow are summarised as follows. It is an active process without a product and is intrinsically motivated. Also there is no external pressure to conform and it is about lifting the 'player' to their highest levels of functioning, involving creativity and imagination. It involves reflection, the wallowing in ideas and it actively uses previous first hand experiences. In addition, it is sustained and helps us to function ahead of our real-life ability levels and allows control, using competence previously attained. The child or adult can initiate it, but adults need to be aware of not imposing rules, or directing activity and it can be a solitary activity. It can be in with partnership with others and brings together what we learn, feel and understand.

Structured play is planned and led by an adult, who may or may not work alongside the child during the activity. Most people agree that children benefit from a degree of structure, and even setting has its restrictions regarding time, space and staffing which leads to the need to 'frame' the daily routine. This should not, however, lead to lack of flexibility and lack of opportunity for play to flow. A balance needs to be achieved with the structured introduction to a new experience leading the child to further (free play) exploration of the materials or subject.

Spontaneous play allows children to develop their play ideas for themselves, with the adult providing a range of resources and materials. Children learn successfully if they are allowed to 'seize the moment' and this is where adult flexibility is vital. The child who unexpectedly brings a jar of snails into the nursery offers the opportunity for an 'on the spot' discussion of minibeasts, life form, houses, bodily needs (food, water and so on). The interest of the children will be captured by the excitement of the snails' arrival, and therefore opportunities for learning are high. Similarly, the child who makes a pretend kite (perhaps triggered by observation of kites elsewhere) and

runs around the garden trying to fly it, will be learning the basic aerodynamics, as well as having fun and fulfilling a spontaneous needs to try something new.

Socialisation develops as a child's play moves from solitary actions of the toddler absorbed in their own world through to the complex games involving rules seen in the infant school playground. The ability to co-operate with others moves through stages, which are dependent on both the maturational stage of development of the individual child and the opportunities and experience that has been made available to them.

The first stage of play is referred to as solitary play. The child plays contentedly on his or her own, still needed the reassurance of the adult. This play is typical up to two years of age. It is frequently imitative, demonstrating a basic understanding of the actions of others within a child's social world. An example of solitary imitative play is the child pretending to brush the hair of a doll or teddy, usually very briefly.

The next stage in play is parallel play in which a child finds enjoyment playing alongside, but not with, another child. The children do not necessarily even acknowledge that the other exists, and make no reference to what the other is doing. This is true parallel play, one child playing parallel to the other. It usually begins to emerge between two and three years of age.

At this stage in social play the child begins to watch the actions of others, enjoying their play from a distance. They are not as yet ready to play with others, but learn a great deal from their observations. This stage of play is typically seen between three and four years of age.

By four years old, most children are ready to play co-operatively with others. This simple co-operative play begins in an uncomplicated manner, involving the shared enjoyment of similar activity. A good example of this is a group of children all dressing dolls together. There are no rules and no restrictions. It is simply a pleasurable play experience with others.

This last and most developed stage in the process of children's play involves them interacting as a group. This can involve the physical co-operation needed to complete a joint task, or play which includes complex rules, involving the on of agreed (but 'evolving as the go') roles.

Play is a valuable part of various areas of development. Through play, children develop various skills such as physical, intellectual, and language, emotional and social skills (PILES).

Physical skills take place once a child is able to move around independently. It gives a child greater control over himself and his surroundings. Physical development include: running, jumping, playing football, climbing, painting, swimming, playing with toys, cutting, hand and eye co-ordination, drawing/writing. Intellectual skills develop the child new skills/abilities with words and objects, experiment with the properties of creative media and play equipment and solves his own problems in his own way. Intellectual development includes thinking, speaking, listening, concentration, memory, perception, sound/senses, body language and sign language.

Language skills is a valuable part in other area of development, i.e. intellectual, physical, social and emotional development. Communication development includes speaking, listening, friendly, helping others, body language, and different expressions (verbally or non-verbally) during various physical activities or emotional development. Emotional development includes happy sad, frustration, cry, excited, lonely and bored as play provides an outlet for a child's feelings. Social skills occur when a child interacts or mixes with other people or when children play together. It includes the development of various social abilities such are: relationship, helping others, co-operation, friendly, shearing, caring, independence, toilet habits, dressing.

Jean Piaget was a Swiss psychologist who originally studied biology. He became interested in knowledge and its origins, which they called the 'embryology of intelligence'. He was particularly interested in the way that children think, and concluded that the thinking of children is different to the thinking of adults. Piaget considered the interaction between the child and their environment to be the main factor in influencing cognitive development (the development of learning through thinking and problem solving), and this active involvement in their own learning is described by Piaget as a series of schemas (principles). During the early years, Piaget considered that these schemas changed and developed through the process of assimilation and accommodation.

Maria Montessori believed that, given the right stimuli, children are naturally self-motivated. She saw children as active learners in much the same way as Piaget did, but she did not value play in its free-flow sense, believing that children became independent learners if they are encouraged to work alone.

Montessori believed that the children needed to work though the range of learning materials she developed before they were ready to express their own ideas. This range of materials particularly encouraged dexterity, and as they worked with them the child was guided from the simple to more the complex tasks. This included activities to learn particular skills. Montessori believes that each activity should only be used for the purpose for which it was designed and did not value imaginative play.

She encouraged children to form letters through sand and finger play and no methods involving the formal learning of reading and writing was seen in a Montessori nursery, although a great emphasis was placed on the richness of literature and use of language. Montessori encouraged independence and considered that children had reached the highest point of their learning when they were silently absorbed in their activity. She referred to this as the 'polarisation of attention'.

Montessori believed that the adult's role is to 'follow the child'. She based her theories on extensive observation of children and the acceptance today of children being eager learners from birth is often attributed to her theories.

These various theorists have had an enormous impact on play. Jean Piaget saw play as a method to encourage cognitive development. Montessori also believed that play was an essential tool to develop the child intellectually. Like Piaget she thought children were self-motivated. She did not value "free play" unlike Freud who saw free play as a window to the child's emotions. Freud believed that children express their true feelings through "free play", because they were in charge of the play the unconscious is allowed to express itself.

To conclude, it would appear that play is essential for many reasons. Theorists recognise that play can develop children emotionally and intellectually. Play takes many forms. Its importance is over looked often; however, it is the building blocks for future learning. The planning of play must be implemented effectively to ensure that the child gains the most from play that is possible. The adult's role is crucial in ensuring this

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