

Introduction

The age range I will be looking at is four years to five years eleven months old, therefore in the reception class following the Foundation Stage curriculum. The National Curriculum for Physical Education (DFE, 1995a) for all year groups in Key Stages 1 and 2 became a legal requirement on 1 August 1995, by means of an Order made by the Secretaries of State for Education and for Wales. As the reception class does not follow the National curriculum yet they do not come under this, although many schools do include this class in physical education lessons. I will be looking at the three different types of play that can promote learning for the chosen age range. The following are descriptions of these three types of play:

1. Creative play- creative is where children explore and discover things around them in an inventive way. It has a lot to do with the children's senses, what they hear, see, smell, taste, and touch and also to do with different materials. If children are provided with opportunities, experiences and activities. The children could also develop skills such as:
 - Physical- fines and grosses motor skills
 - Social- working in pairs or groups will make the children feel more confident and will and will heighten their self-esteem.
 - Emotional- drawing/painting feelings (happy and sad colours). The children will feel proud of their work.
 - Intellectual- knowledge of subject and materials used

In this area of play I believe it should be stressed that children should be praised as they have put a lot of work into something even if it is totally non-recognisable as anything, considering some of the most famous artists drew/painted in abstract and their work is widely appreciated. At this age creative activities will be greatly influenced by key stage one requirements. They will have creativity incorporated into the learning of other topics. They will be beginning to learn some creative skills and follow instructions to carry them out. Also children will be developing a wider concentration span and more advanced fine manipulative skills. Tassoni and Beith (2002 p375) state that between the age of four and six 'Children are more interested in creating things e.g. making a cake, drawing cards and planting seeds. They enjoy being with other children although they may play in pairs. Children are beginning to express themselves through painting and drawing as well as through play. They are enjoying using their physical skills in games and are confident when running and climbing.

Materials that can be used in creative play and that will also promote learning: sand and alternate materials, water, painting and drawing materials, malleable materials, adhesive materials, construction and scrap materials.

At the beginning of the Foundation Stage children use their bodies to explore texture and space, this will develop towards the end of the Foundation Stage to children exploring colour, texture, shape, form and space in two or three dimensions. (Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage curriculum early learning goal for exploring materials p121). At the beginning of the Foundation Stage children show an interest in what they see, hear, smell, touch and feel and towards the end of the Foundation Stage this develops to the children responding in a variety of ways to what they see, hear, smell, touch and feel. (Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage curriculum early learning goal for responding to experiences and expressing and communicating ideas p127).

2. Imaginative play- imaginative play is a lot to do with role-play, it can be carried out for enjoyment purposes in everyday play and it can be incorporated by practitioners so the children can explore different situations and fantasy worlds and acting.

Items such as (Tassoni and Beith 2002 p394):

- ☐ Small world play, such as Lego or play Mobil
- ☐ Puppets and dolls, especially persona dolls
- ☐ Books and stories
- ☐ Sand and water play
- ☐ Painting and drawing
- ☐ Play dough

Can be provided to help develop skills such as (Tassoni and Beith 2002 p 392)

- ☐ Manipulative
- ☐ Social
- ☐ Sharing
- ☐ Self confidence, feeling of security
- ☐ Language and communication

At the beginning of the Foundation Stage children use isolated words and phrases and/or gestures to communicate with those well known to them and towards the end of the Foundation Stage children develop to speak clearly and audibly with confidence and control and show awareness of the listener. (Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation

Stage curriculum early learning goal for language for communication p 55).

3. Physical play- 'The term 'physical play' is a term that can be used to describe the type of play in which children use their large muscles and exercise their whole body. They learn to control large and small muscles and develop co-ordination and surplus energy is expended' (Tassoni and Beith 2002 p 382). Physical play is where children are using their muscles (large and small)) for enjoyment purposes. There is a less called P.E (physical education) in which children can develop and refine their skills and muscles in different e.g. dancing, athletics, and climbing apparatus. During self-directed play, children can be physical in the following ways, rolling, balancing, skipping, sliding, hanging, running, kicking, jumping, hopping, pushing, pulling etc. there are ten areas of co-ordination in which children develop in:

- Space and direction- identifying position of body in relation to surroundings
- Balance- controlling the movement of the body by transfer of weight moving backwards, forwards and sideways
- Rhythm- developing movement flows and co-ordination
- Physical self-awareness (body image)-understanding the way the body moves and what each part of the body can do
- Fine muscle development- physical co-ordination of toes, fingers and eyes
- Large muscle development- particularly around the pelvic and shoulder girdles
- Basic body movement- moving skillfully and freely without thought
- Symmetrical activity- right and left side. To develop both sides of the body
- Hand/eye co-ordination- ensures the working together of hands, eyes and arms
- Eye/foot co-ordination- ensures the working together of eyes, legs and feet

At the beginning of the Foundation Stage children should be able to negotiate an appropriate pathway both indoors and outdoors this will develop to the children showing respect for other children's personal space when playing among them. This will eventually at the end of the Foundation Stage develop into the children showing awareness of space,

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of them and of others. Stage curriculum early learning goal for sense of space p109).

Example of the three types of play and how they promote the desired learning

1. For an example of creative play, I am going to describe a play opportunity for this age group. Gloop is a mixture made simply from mixing corn flour and water in a bowl. A few additional resources that could be used are, smaller bowls, cups, plastic utensils (all of different shapes and sizes). It is a strange substance that can be made to different consistencies. When made with a lot of water it will be in liquid form when left dormant and will run through fingers when scooped up but when rolled between hands it will become solid and return to liquid when stopped. When made thicker it will be able to be sliced and it will slowly return to the original form. It can be picked up in a lump and will slowly drip/run. This activity I think is suitable for all ages that are at school, I have tried it with the following age groups, five, seven, ten and thirteen and was also enjoyed by adults. Children will begin to understand liquids and solids, shapes and sizes (through cups, bowls etc) and texture.

The play opportunity 'Gloop' will help to encourage creative skills because it takes many forms, the children can experiment and explore the texture, the consistency and the properties of it. It uses a lot of fine motor skills, using the fingers and hands to pick up and roll, squeeze through and transfer to other containers. This will promote in the way of experience, the children will learn by doing.

2. An example of imaginative play. Creating a home corner would encourage child-led imaginative play. A home corner can be adapted to suit a subject that is being taught. In the home corner or separately there could also be dressing up clothes to assist in role-play. For this type of play this is an example of an imaginative play opportunity. The subject being taught is animals; the home corner is rearranged and decorated to resemble either a jungle or a zoo. This could also be linked with asking children questions about animals and what their characteristics are, they could also take turns in groups acting in general about the subject.

A home corner would improve imaginative skills in children by encouraging them to participate in role-play activities. The children can make up their own games and enforce their own rules for the game. The children can work in groups or alone and can also dress up and use props to assist their game. Imaginative play can be linked with

social skills as the children will be working in groups and pairs in child led activities and in structured activities led by an adult in the setting. These skills will be helpful in later life for the children to make healthy relationships.

3. One play opportunity for physical play is swimming some schools have pools on the property and use them for regular lessons, however for schools that do not have this facility can organise to go on weekly trips to the local pool or just as a one off. Swimming is a great way of exercising as well as good physical fun. Swimming uses all of the muscles in the body and can be developed and refined. Swimming can link with all of the ten areas of co-ordination. It is suitable for all ages particularly because there can be different classes for different abilities and there is always room to progress. Children with any sort of impairment can also join in as there should be helpers available and equipment that would aid them getting in and out of the pool. Swimming would improve physical skills in children by working all of the muscles at the same time and progressing at this. It will strengthen muscle including the heart; maintaining and developing bone density. It allows the children to exercise their whole bodies inside and out! There is also opportunity for fine motor development in the form of bricks and bands, which are thrown to the bottom of the pool at different depths, which the children have to collect. It is important to encourage children but not pressure them as it may have adverse affects later in life.

The role of the adult in all of the play opportunities is to supervise the children; it is also to provide any materials or equipment that will be needed. The adult will have to think about health and safety for the activity to make sure that no harm comes to the children. The adult will be there to explain what to do initially and be there to answer any questions the children may have. The adult will also ask questions to encourage the children to think about the subject more deeply; these questions will normally be open ended so the children's answers will not be one-worded. The adult will also encourage the children to stick at the activity for a decent amount of time and to help the children to think up new ways of playing the game and to plan different rules.

Children need a positive environment for play and learning for many reasons. A positive environment means that there is a positive approach to everything for example it is important for children to learn that some races and cultures speak in different languages and that people have different accents. The children need to learn that they are not strange or unusual; they are different and special as every one is. It is also good to be positive in this area because children are exposed to the wider world.

To create an environment that is positive and stimulating:

- Adult input and support when children are playing
- Inventive, colourful and imaginative design
- Good interaction between all people, children, adults and guests
- A wide range of age and stage appropriate toys and equipment
- Objects and artifacts

To keep it particularly positive the adults in the setting need to act as good, positive role models by helping others, sharing, taking turns, listening, not interrupting, and also treating all children fairly no matter what they're gender, age, race, religion or cultural beliefs.

Children are people after all just smaller, they just the same rights and in some situations more.

There are a few different strategies that practitioners and other adults use to promote children's learning. The adult needs a good knowledge of the subject before the strategy of the activity is chosen as they may be asked questions and because they need to go into depth explaining it. 'Teachers need to be clear not only about what they would like children to become under their guidance but about what children were actually like when the process began' (Margaret Donaldson, 1978). All of the following are different strategies that need an adult present:

- Structured- this strategy is planned by the adults with a desired learning outcome to work towards. The adult's role is to guide the children towards these learning outcomes. The learning outcomes can be altered to suit the needs of specific children and their abilities. Learning outcomes can vary from developing speaking and listening to handwriting and other physical skills as well as mathematical skills and cognitive skills.
- Unstructured- Again an adult provides an activity, but in this case the children can use it in their own way to gain as much or as little as they like. The outcome may sometimes be completely different from what the adult may have planned. The children can choose what to do in the activity or think up their own ideas of what to do. An example would be having reading books left out. Reading books, the child can choose what book they want and they can read it, look at the pictures, make up a story from the pictures or use the book as a prop in role-play. They can abandon it without blame, as it is a self-chosen activity. The children can choose their own reading difficulty level and can
- Experiential- (Tassoni and Beith 2002 p 49) 'Children learn from life and their environment. Opportunities to learn are drawn from events happening in the environment; for example, if it is snowing, the children take 'snow' as the theme for the day.
- Thematic- this is learning of the curriculum that is incorporated into activities that relate to their experiences and understanding. This can be linked a lot with role-play, as the children will act out what they have seen and heard in their own experiences. This will often include the use of props (dolls, telephones, pretend food etc). (Zahirun Sayeed and Ellen Guerin Early Years Play 2000) 'Thematic fantasies- using a familiar stories as a basis for exploring themes.'

The adult can act as a good role model in these circumstances because the adult will begin by showing the children what they can do, therefore setting a good example of what to do and how to act.

Tassoni and Beith (2002 p48) 'Experiences are planned in the framework of a curriculum, which provides different learning opportunities. Although curriculum planning varies according to the setting, it should always be varied, enjoyable, and allow for spontaneity to support every child's individual learning needs and stage of development.' There are some good and some bad points of the current curriculum that is in force. An advantage of the curriculum is that it focuses on points that will benefit the children, the curriculum must be appropriate to the age and stage of the children in mind, and it has to cover all aspects of the children's learning and development. A curriculum must support children whatever their needs may be and promote their health and safety. The curriculum must also promote all people in a positive way no matter what race, religion, belief, gender or impairment. Another advantage is that in the Foundation Stage curriculum is that as the children are not actually in a key stage, a lot of their learning is through play, I think this is especially

An advantage as they are getting used to be at school, it is the crossing point between home and school and it helps them to settle in as they are having fun. A disadvantage of the current curriculum is that the learning outcomes are not as strict as in the key stage one curriculum, it based very much on unstructured child-led activities. Although I believe that it should mostly be play activities in the Foundation Stage curriculum there should still be a lot of focus on what the children are getting out of the activity. A structured curriculum can also disadvantage the teacher in a way because they do not have as much freedom and spontaneity as the practitioners in for example a pre-school or nursery. It can also be difficult to incorporate things such as practising for a school play, the children need quite a lot of practice (to for example remember their lines) but the learning outcomes for the day/week restricts this as the teacher cannot make last minute changes that exclude the six areas of learning.

I think that a childcare and education worker could enrich and extend the children's play in the following ways:

- Learning about and participating in games and activities from different countries and/or different versions of games they may already know of. E.g. baseball can be compared to rounders or how American football can be compared to rugby and soccer to football.
- During everyday learning the teacher could involve more group working for example group acting. When the project is practiced enough the children could perform either half the class in front of the other and vice versa or in front of the school. The teacher could maybe put forward a

suggestion to the head teacher that there can be some sort of rote for each class getting a chance to act in front of the school.

- I think that children would benefit from having more time in the week set aside for physical education. It would benefit best during the morning as the children have a lot of energy and this would help them to concentrate in the afternoon better. Also they could have more and different equipment to use.
- Learning about and having more experiences about religions, races and beliefs. Trips could be organised to go to a place of praying for certain religions e.g. visiting a mosque. They could also learn about different ways people are blessed under the eyes of God e.g. baptising, christening. They could learn about this by the teacher obtaining a videotape of a ceremony like this.

Play opportunities are important in the early years because it enables development in five areas, creative, physical, imaginative, manipulative and social. Tassoni and Beith (2002 p52) 'A children need to play:

- To develop an enquiring mind and through experiment and discovery develop early concepts.
- To allow children to develop their physical awareness and gross motor skill.
- To create an understanding attitude towards the natural world.
- To form a sound foundation on which to build all future knowledge and develop early reading and mathematical concepts.
- To enable children to acquire manipulative skills, spatial awareness and understanding of the properties/characteristics of materials.
- To gain aesthetic awareness, tackle experiences, pleasure of colour and personal satisfaction in creation.
- To encourage children to express themselves, socialise and cope with their emotions through role-play and the beginning of drama. The social part of play is especially important as children learn from others and they learn to interact appropriately with both adults and children. It helps children to cooperate in-group situations. Most importantly a positive early years play experience affects how children will feel act in the school later on in life. It can be the decider on whether they appreciate school and have an enjoyment in being there or whether they are rebellious and badly behaved. It could be said that 'first impressions count' and as children spend the first part of their school life in the foundation stage class this is how it could be seen.

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