Play (Part 3): Limitations of play

Overview

The purpose of this CPD, part 3, is to continue to explore play in more depth and focus on potential limitations of play that you may encounter. This CPD is suitable for anyone working with or wanting to work with young children and/or anyone who simply has an interest in play. It has been separated into parts. You can undertake all of the parts in turn as they can build on each other, or you can just undertake the particular part that is of most interest to you.

Target audience

Early years workers/managers/key persons, those in or interested in working within nurseries and pre-schools or reception and Key Stage 1, TAs (particularly those who may work within the Early Years Foundation Stage)

Duration

Approximately 1-1½ hours – the completion time will depend how quickly you work and whether you undertake any of the extension activities.

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Introduction

Play and playfulness is often seen as important in our society, particularly in supporting children's learning and development (Fisher, 2008). For example, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (Department for Education (DfE) 2017, p.9) makes it a legal duty for children to learn through play. In contrast, Fleet and Reed (2019) argue that there are many challenges in embracing play, both as an overarching concept and for its benefits to young children's learning. Play in young children's learning (or indeed learning at any age) is often misunderstood and undervalued. However, when practitioners and parents have a deeper understanding of play, they have a greater awareness of the life-long benefits it provides. They are also better equipped to provide effective play-based opportunities for young children (Blaise, Edwards and Brooker, 2014; Moyles, 2015; Goodliff and Canning, 2018; Ferholt, Nillson and Lecusay, 2019).

In Parts 1 and 2 of this CPD you will have explored the overarching concept of play and how play and learning are intrinsically linked. In this section you are encouraged to explore some limitations of play and to begin to explore what the long-term impacts of not providing sufficient play opportunities could be for children.

Whilst it may be universally accepted that children learn through play, a challenge for the early years sector is that there is little research to support learning through play in educational contexts (Anning, 2015). While many would argue that play is essential for learning the challenge, as discussed in part 1, is that play is difficult to define and is open to individual interpretation. This interpretation impacts on the value we as individuals place on play and playfulness and, how we as individuals provide playful opportunities in whatever our context might be. For example, Parker-Rees (2015, p.121) explains that "…artificially separating the 'work' of the hunt for knowledge and the play of social gatherings, distorts our understanding of how we come to know about our world". Therefore, if children are not given the opportunities, in terms of time, space and even resources to play, to seek, experiment and seek some more, then their innate curiosity and experimentations cannot be realised, and learning would be curtailed.

Furthermore, Moyles (2015, pp.41-66) argues that society and government attitudes to the activities that children should be engaging in causes many tensions in early years provision. Whilst early years educators would promote the value of play in children's learning, there is a downward pressure from early years policy to channel play into more school-like activities and more formal teaching. Even with careful training this can leave little time and priority for play and playful learning. Additionally, Barr and Truelove (2015) note the crucial influence of working with parents/carers in supporting children's playful learning, including with regard to economic issues that may result in families unable to provide suitable clothing or money for resources, reducing access to some types of play or play in certain weathers or at certain times of year.

It is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) that children have a right to play. However, as Moyles (2015, pp. 41-66), Barr and Truelove (2015) and Parker-Rees (2015, p.121) suggest, fewer outside places to play, have increased concern over safety, risk-adverse cultures, top-down pressure for formal teaching and the relating time, space and issues with training and resources, limit play in unhelpful ways. Within this CPD you have already been encouraged to explore challenges when defining play and how personal interpretations impact on the value ascribed to play and, therefore, the time and space that it is allowed to occupy. Furthermore, as detailed in Holland (2003), Hyder (2005), Grieshaber and McArdle (2010) and Smidt (2011) there are certain types of play that are universally accepted as 'good' and 'acceptable', therefore allowed, and other types of play such as war, conflict, rough and tumble, weapon and even

superhero play that is considered 'bad' or less 'acceptable' and either curtailed or prevented altogether.

The purpose of this CPD part 3 is to begin to explore some of these limitations in more detail and begin to consider what the implications might be if we do not support children's playful learning.

Objectives

- Begin to explore some initial limitations of play.

- Begin to consider why a lack of playful opportunities might have some negative impacts.

Resources

A means of recording your ideas, such as a note paper and pen.

Internet access for the following reading:

- Bailey, E. (2017) *Placing trust in play*. Available at: https://tactyc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Placing-trust-in-play.final_.doc (Accessed: 16th April 2020)

- Bryce-Clegg, A. (2017) *Hope that's not a gun.* Available at: https://abcdoes.com/abc-does-a-blog/2017/03/11/i-hope-thats-not-a-gun/ (Accessed: 16th April 2020)

- Gleave, J. (2008) Risk and play: a literature review. Available at: https://springzaad.nl/litdocs/risk_and_play-a_literature_review.pdf (Accessed: 16th April 2020).

- Gray, P. (2017) 'What exactly is play, and why is it such a powerful vehicle for learning?', *Topics in Language Disorders*, 37 (3), pp. 217-228. Available at: https://www.psychologytoday.com/sites/default/files/what_is_play_published.pdf (Accessed: 27th April 2020)

- Little, H., Sandseter, E.B.H. and Wyver, S. (2012) 'Early childhood teachers' beliefs about children's risky play in Australia and Norway', *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 13 (4), pp. 300-316. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236986857_Early_Childhood_Teachers'_Beliefs_about_Children's_Risky_Play_in_Australia_and_Norway (Accessed: 27th April 2020)

- Perkins, A. (2018) "*We don't play guns at nursery, they hurt people": why we need to talk about weapon play in the early years.* Available at: http://imx07wlgmj301rre1jepv8h0-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/We-Don%E2%80%99t-Play-Guns-at-Nursery-Why-We-Need-To-Talk-About-Weapon-Play-in-the-Early-Years.Amy-Perkins.doc (Accessed: 16th April 2020)

- Sanseter, E.B.H. and Kleppe, R. (2019) *Outdoor risky play.* Available at: http://www.child-encyclopedia.com/sites/default/files/textes-experts/en/5223/outdoor-risky-play.pdf (Accessed: 16th April 2020)

- United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (1989) Available at: https://downloads.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/unicef-convention-rights-child-

uncrc.pdf?_ga=2.108387526.573889958.1587045135-753477617.1584980984 (Accessed: 16th April 2020)

- Weinstein, N. (2011) *EYFS best practice: all about ...superhero play.* Available at: https://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/features/article/eyfs-best-practice-all-about-superhero-play (Accessed: 16th April 2020)

Internet access for the following videos

- Right to play - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5tjRPWPhIfA (running time 3:09)

- Participation through the arts - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ygwVQWEEfEU (Running time 8:30)

- Risk in play - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FeJPLOHJNMA (running time 2:47)

- The role of play in any setting - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pjoyBZYk2zI (running time 8:11)

Task 1: Exploring playworlds

In part 2 you were encouraged to explore what supported children's learning through play and what the role of the adult in this might be. Ferholt, Nillson and Lecusay (2019, p.21) claim that play is best supported by the creation of play spaces where play and learning, imagination and creativity are encouraged, they call these spaces playworlds. Effective playworlds for children have three key components: adults need to fully participate meeting the child on their level, play spaces need to be co-constructed not just created by adults, and the adult needs to understand and value what happens in the playworld. The playworld is the whole picture of play, it encompasses the time, the place, the space, the resources and the individuals (adults and children) involved.

Think back to places you liked to play. These play spaces may have been inside (for example a particular room in your own house or that of a friend/relative, or an area of preschool if you went to one), or outside (for example a garden, wood, park, beach). List what it was about that environment that you liked. How did it affect your play?

Now watch the following video clips:

- Right to play - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5tjRPWPhIfA (running time 3:09)

- Participation through the arts - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ygwVQWEEfEU (Running time 8:30)

Read the following article by Bailey (2017) available at: https://tactyc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Placing-trust-in-play.final_.doc.

Make notes from both with regard to the key factors that both enable and support children in developing purposeful, effective play spaces and the things you feel may be barriers or limitations to play. Ensure to include in your notes a reflection on the role of the adult in the playworld. For example, in the second video about 'participation in the arts', the adults take on a variety of roles from leading the play right through to leaving the children to play independently, with many other roles in between. As you watch can you identify these roles and decide how useful each of these roles are in a playworld and why?

It is important to start with what works, as knowing how to create effective playworlds can provide us with clues about the limitations and barriers to play.

Read down your list and think about either your own experiences as a child of playing or the playworlds you create in your home or setting (or both), add anything to your list you feel you have missed.

Now spend 10 minutes reflecting on whether any of the benefits or barriers you have identified exist within the playworlds you create for the children in your care.

- Which ones?

- What do you feel you do well?

- What could you change to remove or reduce any barriers?

- What will you change and what will you keep the same?

It is always best to start with small changes that are realistic and therefore achievable.

Task 2: Inappropriate play, or is it?

It is important when considering appropriate and inappropriate play that we understand what our own values and beliefs are, as this will be the starting point for what we as individuals, parents/carers and educators are prepared to create space and time for with regard to play. As previously mentioned, many parents/carers and educators can feel uncomfortable with certain types of play, normally those that involve war, conflict, weapons, risk, rough and tumble and even superhero play.

Yet Smidt (2011, p.106) states that "children, in their endless search for meaning, try to make sense of the big themes. These include vital issues like right and wrong, good and bad, life and death, power and money and poverty and war. These are themes that most adults grapple with". So, are typically considered inappropriate plays themes really inappropriate?

Within this task you are encouraged to explore your own views on appropriate and inappropriate play and consider the impacts, if any, that your view may have on the play and learning of the children around you.

On a piece of paper draw two columns. In one column note down any activities, games or play you feel are 'appropriate' and any activities, games or play you feel are 'inappropriate' in the other, if you can add your reason for each decision. Spend no more than 10 minutes.

Below are a series or resources that focus just a few types of play that are normally considered within the category of inappropriate. Here you can access as many of the resources as you wish although you are encouraged to pick a minimum of two.

Superhero and weapon play

- Article by Weinstein (2011) writing for Nursery world addressing the benefits of superhero play in the early years, available at https://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/features/article/eyfs-best-practice-all-about-superhero-play

- Informal blog by Bryce-Clegg (2017) who explores and reflects on his changing understanding of gun and weapon play in his early years practice, available at https://abcdoes.com/abc-does-a-blog/2017/03/11/i-hope-thats-not-a-gun/.

- An article further considering gun play in an early years setting, available at http://imx07wlgmj301rre1jepv8h0-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/We-Don%E2%80%99t-Play-Guns-at-Nursery-Why-We-Need-To-Talk-About-Weapon-Play-in-the-Early-Years.Amy-Perkins.doc

Risk

- Video clip discussing risk in play - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FeJPLOHJNMA (running time 2:47)

- Selection of articles about risky play can be found below, you are encouraged to read as many or as few as you wish:

  - Little, Sandseter and Wyver (2012), available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236986857_Early_Childhood_Teachers'_Beliefs_about_Children's_Risky_Play_in_Australia_and_Norway

  - Sandseter and Kleppe (2019) available at http://www.child-encyclopedia.com/sites/default/files/textes-experts/en/5223/outdoor-risky-play.pdf

  - Gleave (2008), available at https://springzaad.nl/litdocs/risk_and_play-a_literature_review.pdf

Once you have engaged with some at least two resources go back to your original list of appropriate and inappropriate activities.

- Have your views changed?

- Whether your views have changed or whether they have remained the same, reflect on why this is.

Task 3: What might happen if play is not supported?

Gray (2017) suggests that if play is not supported for children then the impacts can be long lasting not just for children's learning and development but for their general emotional and mental wellbeing. Read Gray's article, which is available at https://www.psychologytoday.com/sites/default/files/what_is_play_published.pdf.

You can read the whole article if you wish, otherwise navigate to page 225 and read the section entitled 'consequence of the decline in children's play'.

Watch this video clip which considers the role of play on building resilience in young children, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pjoyBZYk2zI (running time 8:11).

Now reflect on how important play is for young children's wellbeing. You might consider commenting on the following thoughts:

- Do you agree play is declining?

- What do you think the impact of this might be?

Task 4: Reflection on learning

Now think about the way in which you are interacting with children and what context, whether that is as a parent, as a childminder in a home environment or as an educator within a setting or reception class. Consider the following questions and note your thoughts:

- Have you noticed a decline in play? If so, why do you think that is?

- What do you think are the main factors that limit or stop children's play? Why do they have that affect? What can be done about it?

- What might need to change?

- What would your role in this change be?

- What now?

Further activities linked to play (also recommended for existing FDEP students)

A TED talk by Peter Gray, exploring the biological implications around play and its decline which has lasting impacts for wellbeing (running time 16 minutes), available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bg-GEzM7iTk.

Sources

These sources have informed this CPD module although they are not all freely available online. You do not need to read these sources to complete the CPD; however, you may wish to look out for them for further study after completing the CPD module. They are particularly useful for existing Foundation Degree students.

Anning, A. (2015) 'Play and the legislated curriculum', in Moyles, J. (ed.) *The excellence of play.* 4th edn. Maidenhead: Open University Press, pp. 26-40.

Barr, K. and Truelove, L. (2015) 'Play and the achievement of potential', in Moyles, J. (ed.) *The excellence of play.* 4th edn. Maidenhead: Open University Press, pp. 70-88.

Blaise, M., Edwards, S. and Brooker, L. (2014) 'Theoretical perspectives on play and learning', in Brooker, L., Blaise, M and Edwards, S. (eds.) *The SAGE handbook of play and learning in early childhood.* London: Sage*,* pp. 5-8.

Department for Education (2017) *Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five.* Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2 (Accessed: 19 April 2020)

Ferholt, B., Nillson, M. and Lecusay, R. (2019) 'Preschool teachers being alongside young children', in Alcock, S. and Stobbs, N. (eds.) *Rethinking play as pedagogy.* Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 17-32.

Fisher, J. (2008) *The foundations of learning.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Fleet, A. and Reed, M. (2019) 'Entering contested waters', in Alcock, S. and Stobbs, N. (eds.) *Rethinking play as pedagogy*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. xviii – xx.

Goodliff, G. and Canning, N. (2018) 'Introduction: young children's play and creativity – multiple voices', in Goodliff, G. et al. (eds.) *Young children's play and creativity – multiple voices*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. xi-xiv.

Goouch , K. (2008) 'Understanding playful pedagogies, play narratives and play spaces', *Early Years Journal*, 28 (1), pp. 93-102.

Holland, P. (2003) *We don't play with guns here.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Hyder, T (2005) *War, conflict and play*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Moyles, J. (2015) 'Starting with play: taking play seriously', in Moyles, J. (ed.) *The excellence of play.*4th edn. Maidenhead: Open University Press, pp. 41-55.

Parker-Rees, R. (2015) 'Learning from play: hunting and gathering', in Moyles, J. (ed.) *The excellence of play*. 4th edn. Maidenhead: Open University Press, pp. 121-134.

Smidt, S. (2011) *Playing to learn: the role of play in the early years.* Abingdon: Routledge.

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