Play And Children’s Development

Play is a very crucial part of a child's development. The meaning behind play is to engage in an activity for enjoyment and recreation rather than a serious or practical purpose. It encourages children to explore and experiment with actions and objects which is why adults in the environment need to make sure it is an appropriate activity to avoid frustration and boredom. Benefits of play include: Wider imagination, language, confidence, teamwork and problem solving skills. In conclusion, children play to learn, not learn to play.

From birth to two years, children engage in Unoccupied and Solitary play, which is where our ‘Social stages of play’ come in. Unoccupied play is the random movements that infants make with no clear purpose, which is the beginning of play. Unoccupied play occurs from 0-3 months. An example of ‘play’ at this age would be the fact that they clasp their hands, which is fine motor skills, which is useful as they will use it in future play. The adults support this movement by encouraging them to give a firm grasp, using their fine motor skills, whether it be by giving them a rattle, or using their own fingers so the children can hold on. The adult needs to ensure the child is comfortable by doing all this, and that there is no sudden/harmful movements. Solitary play is a second stage throughout the birth to two years age range, where children start to play on their own. Children do not seem to notice other children sitting or playing nearby during this time of play. They are also quite egocentric and therefore don’t adjust to the other children. By the age of one years old, they’re very curious about their surroundings and like to analyze everything; even their carer. By the age of 2, we start to realize the improvement in milestones, which is why adults show how toys work and how they are used e.g. pop up toys and stacking blocks. Even if children are egocentric at this age, adults encourage them to play with children to show it is enjoyable, examples to encourage them is nursery rhymes e.g. Finger rhymes (which encourages fine motor skills) and humpty dumpty. This is where onlooker play takes part, when children watch others play. The child who is looking may ask questions but there is no effort to join the play. Also, they are ‘side by side’ with other children without any interaction, which is why it is useful for an adult to help encourage friendships with other children, which also will help their emotional development.

From two to five years,

We can really start to see the benefits of play when children start to share ideas and toys, and follow established rules and guidelines, which is social play. As it goes in the name, children start to be more social, which improves them in all areas of development, e.g. Language, whilst talking to peers, Physical, whilst they’re using fine and gross motor skills and emotional, where they start to really consider other children’s feelings. In this role and play, adults need to supervise the children to ensure their safety e.g. intervene when children become angry with each other. When it comes to play, risk assessments need to be taken when it comes to playing with toys.

From 5 to eight years,

This is where complex play comes along, with somewhat traces of social play, as they are now in definite friendship groups with an increased amount of Emotional development, as maturation

has taken place. At this age, adults need to provide more challenging opportunities for physical play as well as discussing with children how they may play safely to help them to manage risk e.g. taking turns with the ball so no one trips over and hurts themselves, and putting someone in charge to be a ‘referee’ so they can spot any mistakes or rule breaking some children will do. By giving a higher role, it will boost their confidence and increase their intellectual skills. Being in charge will also teach leadership and responsibility at a young age.