



The 'Value of Play' in The Grove Nursery School

Play makes a major contribution to the physical, social, emotional and intellectual development of young children. In today's society, play is often not respected because it does not seem directly 'educational'. It is the role of the nursery teacher and staff to correct this view stressing the importance of 'quality' play to parents, professionals, other staff members and to the general public.

Jameson and Kidd (1974) state;

"Play is part of the pattern of developmental behaviour. The greater the diversity, and the richer the quality of play, the surer will be the growth of the child to intellectual, emotional, social and physical maturity."

The N.I Curricular Guidance for Pre-School Education, 2019, states;

"....pre school staff should provide children with a rich variety of challenging play activities and other experiences in a stimulating environment. The focus should be to allow children to learn at their own pace, gain a positive image of themselves as learners, be able to cope with uncertainty and to learn through trial and error."

The Rumbold Report, 1990, sums up what play is about.

Play is essentially creative, involving the child as a person, using all their skills and varying abilities. Children play for pleasure- therefore materials must be 'exciting', challenging and enjoyable but play is not simply for recreation, as it is for adults. The playing child is coming to terms with the world around him. Play is the business and work of childhood. It is our 'work' in nursery and from the moment children enter our doors, play activities must be inviting and stimulating. The children must be free to select their own activities and are encouraged to also participate in appropriate group experiences e.g. cookery, art activities, music. Areas will also be created within the classrooms for individual 'reading', quieter activities and solitary play.

A wide selection of equipment will be available to all children and independent choice of this will be encouraged, as is the organisation of the child's own ideas for the direction that the play takes. Staff will respond and promote such spontaneous play, therefore indicating to the child that his/her ideas are valued.

Access of materials is important. The child will be encouraged to choose their toys from a wide selection, combine resources and then of course, to take responsibility for tidying away!

Opportunities for music, energetic play and outdoor play promoting gross motor development will be provided daily, if possible.

We plan structured activities, based on the range of interests, abilities and previous experience found within the class of children, providing a wide and balanced choice of activities. (Younger three year olds may demand different materials and teaching objectives from those with summer birthdates.)

The staff will continually observe and evaluate the play, extending ideas and knowledge and providing materials to aid progression and development in all areas of the curriculum.

Although themes, provision of materials and areas of will be pre-planned by staff, play initiated by the children will be noted and valued. A certain flexibility must be catered for in nursery education Staff must know when to 'extend' play, provide necessary materials and information, challenge and extend the thinking which develops during play activities. As children play, they will practice and develop many types of skills. It is imperative that all staff are aware of learning 'possibilities' and opportunities within all areas of play. These may be noted beside certain pieces of equipment as reminders to staff e.g. filling containers at the water tray. Learning outcomes and provision of materials will be discussed at weekly staff planning/evaluation meetings.

In Early Years, social development is important. By playing in a group, children will learn how others behave. They will learn how to share ideas (and resources), build relationships with adults and peers and extend their own range of experiences. By natural interaction during play, a child will relax and learn from this play alongside or with their peers. Through dramatic play, children can recreate and rehearse roles to understand better the common problems in everyday life e.g. going shopping, hospital visits, the arrival of a new baby.

They can use play as a medium to reduce and gain mastery over their fears and anxieties and also to drain off aggression. The personalities of the children will develop through their play, just as adults develop through life experiences.

`The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child` (Article 31) believes every child is entitled to rest and 'play', stressing the importance of the main teaching medium used in nursery education.

The timetable and routines of our nursery will be planned to allow for long periods of 'uninterrupted' play, the child being able to 'close' his own play before having snack, outside play, story, etc. The child is in control of the organisation of their play. When play 'must' end, as much warning is given as possible (we play quiet (tidy up?) music to remind children that no new activities should be started !)

Again individual responsibility will be encouraged (with staff observing!) i.e. tidy up time, self-registration on arrival, pouring own milk at break, toileting. Children are quick to adapt to routines and within a short period of time, the class will be able to organise themselves effectively. Daily 'helpers' will assist staff to prepare snack, water plants, take care of the plants or 'clear' the dinner tables. We feel this is valuable for one to one conversation, relationship building and responsibility. Also by being a 'helper', a child's feeling of self worth is increased. It is a positive experience!

The class will need to know where materials are stored, cupboards clearly marked and materials 'illustrated' for 'Tidy Up Time'.

We will contribute to the children's play by the materials and experiences we provide, also by questioning, suggestions and general encouragement. Staff will often play alongside the children, e.g. in role within the house corner. By doing so, children view their play as valuable.

We will help children to become more aware of possibilities for play and better able to perceive the problems to be solved. However time will be given for children to settle and develop their play in their own way, free from staff 'interference'.

'The adult's role is to provide suitable 'situations' and then stand back, not to interfere or over persuade but to be on hand to show interest and to provide encouragement when appropriate'.

However staff will monitor group 'dynamics', dominant children, etc. and note progression and individual 'discoveries' to be recorded for future planning. Regular observations of the children's responses to play activities will give staff an up-to-date picture and record, regarding each child's progress in nursery. Suitability and condition of all equipment and apparatus will also be regularly noted.

It is our aim in The Grove that each child should gain great personal satisfaction and enjoyment from their time spent in nursery, progressing in all areas of development.

For more info., check out ccea.org.uk/pre-school/curricular-guidance