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Subject Area - Education

Play Based Learning in Year 1 - A Presentation

INTRODUCTION

Hello, my name is _____. My presentation considers teaching and learning through play, and specifically how teaching and learning through play could improve the educational experiences of children in year 1 instruction.

[Put up powerpoint slide 1]

After reviewing the current year 1 guidance and practice, studying theorists who support formal teaching and those who promote Play Based learning, and critically evaluating the available information, I hope this presentation will convince you as well that Play Based learning deserves a significant place in year 1.

YEAR 1 AT PRESENT

[Put up powerpoint slide 2]

Most recent year 1 guidance promotes a formal method for teaching and learning, with emphasis on literacy and numeracy activities such as the literacy hour (DfES 2005). This means teachers often stand in front of the class to explain material to their pupils, who read and complete written exercises such as worksheets to reinforce what has been presented. Proponents of this method of teaching and learning believe that to be effective education should be structured and rigorous (Hopkins 2003).

[Draw line down middle of flip chart. Write formal on one side of the line and Play Based on the other. Underline these headings. Under formal write structured and rigorous]

To their credit, some teachers use play without specific educational aims, which can result in wasted opportunities for learning. For example, Dewey contended, It is not enough just to introduce play and games Everything depends upon the way in which they are employed (1966, 196). In multi-year research, Adams et al documented positive gains when play was used purposefully as a teaching tool, but not so much when it was viewed as an addition to the real curriculum (2000, 163).

[Write purposeful on the formal side of the flip chart; sometimes not purposeful under the play side]

Siraj-Blatchford notes a serious lack of any hard research that supports formal educational methods, and goes on to question whether a narrow methodology, such as is typical of the formal classroom, can be effective for a diversity of teacher and pupils (Siraj-Blatchford 1993, 405).

[Write teachers/pupils left out on the formal side of the flip chart]

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Although few contemporary theorists or research support formal learning, it has strong political appeal, and allows leaders to emphasise they are using the public's tax monies well and giving solid instruction to pupils (Glickman 1984, 167; Woodhead 2002, 150). Attainment is viewed through assessments such as the SATs, which some contend measure pupils' knowledge rather than their understanding, and emphasise content over concept.

[Write politically good and learn content on the formal side of the flip chart]

Perplexingly, this same group supports Play Based learning just a year earlier in a child's schooling. At the Foundation stage curriculum is almost entirely Play Based. In fact, guidance for the Foundation stage "advocates play and exploration as a basis for literacy learning in the early years" and emphasises the importance of developing literacy through play" (Miller and Smith 2004, 122). This calls into serious question why the Foundation stage is primarily Play Based and year 1 has almost no teaching or learning through play. Does one year of age make that much difference in learning?

[Write questionable motives and no play not supported on the formal side of the flip chart]

In addition, some studies have found that the sharp change in teaching and learning methods is emotionally taxing on pupils, increases their stress levels, makes it more difficult for them to adjust in year 1, and reduces their ability to learn (Bedford 2003, 6).

[Write stressful and change reduces learning on the formal side of the flip chart]

In fact, some children begin to fail because they have difficulty adapting to this new method of teaching and learning (Bedford 2003, 6). Play has been shown to be an effective method for children to develop self-efficacy. Macintyre documents the desire to be right and succeed even in young children, which often causes them to avoid situations where they believe they will fail (Macintyre 2001, 4). In the Play Based Foundation stage, children could try things with no fear of failure making them more likely to stretch out and tackle things they might otherwise avoid" (Macintyre 2001, 4). In year 1 they are graded for either right or wrong answers, which may cause some to withdraw from learning experiences entirely.

[Write low self-efficacy and withdraw on the formal side of the flip chart]

PLAY AND LEARNING

[Put up powerpoint 3]

In examining how teaching and learning through play offers children a better educational opportunity, there is literally a wealth of theorists with all different kinds of research documenting the effectiveness of Play Based learning. "Piaget believed that children were active agents of their own learning and that the major task for them was to develop an ability to organize experiences and learn from them in a way which enables them to make sense of the world (O'Hagan and Smith 2004, 10). Dewey argued that this concept of experiential learning, where the pupil works with and manipulates objects and situations, is a significantly more effective as a teaching and learning method than is a concentration on content, where the pupil memorizes information from a book (Dewey 1966, 202).

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Play Based teaching and learning gives children a context within which they can situate new information and concepts, and helps to keep children's intellect engaged and progressing (Dewey 1966, 234). Umek and Musek argue play encourages greater language comprehension development (Umek and Musek 2001, 56).

[Write gives context and promotes engagement on the play side of the flip chart]

Vygotsky advocated Play Based instruction well into late childhood, arguing that if the tools of thinking available to a child were changed, the child's mind would develop along a structure consistent with those tools (Vygotsky 1978, 126). Therefore children without experiential and Play Based learning do not develop critical thinking thought structures, but think along the lines of passive learning.

[Write increase critical thinking on the play side of the flip chart]

Froebel (1967) saw play as the free activity of the whole life of the pupil's mind in agreement with the child's whole life (Froebel 1967, 167). Bruner et al viewed play as itself a form of problem-solving, requiring self-initiation and increasing problem-solving abilities (Bruner et al 1976, 256). In addition, play reduced the stress in children, making them better able to focus and establish goals in their learning experience (Bruner et al 1976, 256).

[Write holistic, better problem-solving and reduces stress on the play side of the flip chart]

In the same vein as Bedford, they also found play reduced stress and therefore enhanced learning attainment (Bruner et al 1976, 256). Gardner argued that since all pupils do not learn in the same way, formal learning methods short-change all but those who happen to match the teaching of the instructor (Gardner 1991, 14).

[Write multiple learning preferences on the play side of the flip chart]

Finally, when properly structured, play can be a means of effective assessment, where the teacher can see pupils act out their understanding and grasp of a subject. "Children can achieve higher levels of individual cognitive functions (conservation, one-to-one correspondence, decentration) in their symbolic play than they demonstrate when the same mental operations are tested and measured in formal, non-play, situations" (Umek and Musek 2001, 64).

[Write more accurate assessment on the play side of the flip chart]

CONCLUSION

If we step back and look at the pros and cons of Play Based learning in year 1, it becomes obvious that play is not only an effective means of teaching and learning, but often the most beneficial to the child.

I will close this presentation with a quote from Froebel.

[Put up powerpoint slide 4]

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Because he learns through play a child learns willingly and learns much Play must not be left out of the elementary curriculum (Froebel 1967, 167).

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