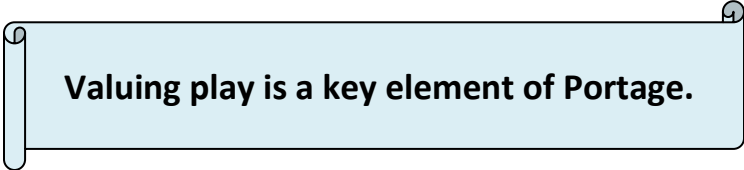


SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF PLAY

THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY

Play is a very important aspect of child development. It is a unique expression of personal priorities and is responsive to the individual's environment. From a child's point of view it is all about having fun! It includes a range of self-chosen activities undertaken for their own interest and enjoyment. Play supports children's emotional well-being as well as learning.

Any learning which results from play is incidental. Children do not consciously play in order to find out how things work or to exercise their imagination but because it is fun and intrinsically satisfying.



Valuing play is a key element of Portage.

How Children Usually Learn Through Play.



Practitioners have a vital role in ensuring all children are able to access play experiences and develop their skills.

‘The role that adults have is crucial. Adults provide time and space and appropriate resources.....They observe play and join in when invited, watching and listening before intervening. They value play and provide safe but challenging environments that support and extend learning and development’

Early Years Matters 2015

Barriers to Developing Play.

If a child has delays or difficulties in the following areas

Motor

Communication and language skills

Socialisation

Being imaginative

Concentration and attention

Cognition and learning

Sensory sensitivities

Hearing and Visual impairments

Ways to reduce the barriers

- **Motor:** make the environment accessible, build experiences around the child with materials they can explore and use.
- **Communication and language:** use language at a level appropriate to the child's development levels, remember stage not age. Consider the use of augmentative and alternative communication methods, on the advice of a Speech and Language Therapist.
- **Socialisation:** provide experiences with positive peer models, with adults setting up play activities at an appropriate level to support each child.
- **Being imaginative:** in the early stages this is linked to real life experiences, self-pretend using a brush on self and then on mummy. Provide materials so that a child can use one object to represent another, e.g., a box becomes a car.
- **Concentration and attention:**
- **Cognitive and learning:** delayed development can limit a child's play.
- **Sensory sensitivities:** Changes in the environment or routine may need to be made to address sensory behaviour, particularly if the behaviour is triggered by anxiety or stress. For example, moving to a quiet area if the child finds it difficult to cope with noise/crowds.
- **Hearing and Visual Impairments:** make the environment as accessible as possible. Seek advice from specialist teachers.

THE CENTRAL ROLE OF PLAY IN PORTAGE PRACTICE

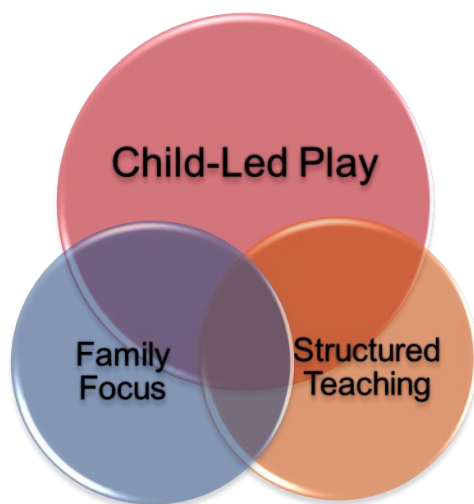
Replicating how children play and learn by

Observations of the child's actions and responses

Providing play opportunities based on child's current skills and interests

Planning with family's time to repeat and practice skills

Being playful, have fun and being positive



Child led play is an integral part of the Portage Model. Making time for child led play allows the child to choose and provides adults and parents the opportunity to:

- follow the child's lead
- share the child's play
- observe and discuss the child's play
- set up regular play experiences
- plan activities based on the child's play

Providing time and space for the child to choose may lead to the discovery of a new area of skills. In the following account of a home visit, the child decided to explore water play. As the Portage Practitioner followed the child's lead, the family and Practitioner gained a lot of information about Annabel's skills:

“On a recent home visit, I had planned to focus on play aimed at developing Annabel’s fine motor skills with some cutting and sticking activities, and to develop Annabel’s participation in reading a “Spot” flap book. Annabel had ideas of her own!

She led me to the bathroom where she wanted to play with a bowl of water. I knew very little about Annabel’s water play; what she enjoyed and what skills she brought to her play. I knew she was just beginning to learn to dry her hands. The bathroom was going to be a good place to play!

Sarah, Annabel’s childminder, and I set up a stand for the bowl; Annabel co-operated in rolling up her sleeves and enjoyed splashing. We found a funnel, a container and a jug and I observed Annabel’s response to these objects. She handled the jug awkwardly, but, with a verbal and slight physical prompt from me, she tried to pour water from the jug, through the funnel and into the container.” ^W

In the example above, the Portage Practitioner was spontaneously able to demonstrate the effectiveness of using verbal and physical prompts to support Annabel’s play and she then discussed these with the childminder. The prompts were then used to plan an outcome focused activity for Annabel to pour water from a jug with minimum support.

Setting up regular play experiences

Families of children with SEND often have a lot of demands on them. Setting aside time “just for play” may be difficult if there are many appointments, therapy sessions etc. that focus on the child’s medical needs. Giving time for play and valuing it can support the family in incorporating regular play sessions into the child’s routines.

Devoting time to child led play allows us to:

- improve communication with the child and with other family members**
 - celebrate the child's independence**
 - validate the child's world, by making ourselves and others aware of the things that are important and motivating for the child.**
-

KEY SKILL AREAS IN DEVELOPING PLAY AND EFFECTIVE LEARNING
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In the Early Years, additional help may be needed for children with SEND to:

- Develop a wide range of play skills
- Learn to share play with others
- Generalise play skills learned

DEVELOPING A RANGE OF PLAY SKILLS
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Some children need encouragement to explore and develop a wide range of play skills in broad areas, including:

- Exploratory play
- Early pretend play
- Physical play
- Creative play
- Imaginative play

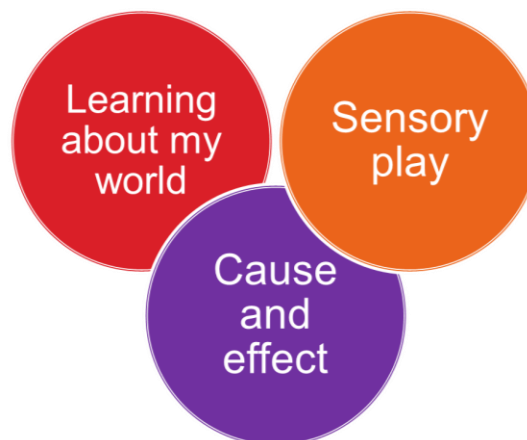
It is important to spend time developing exploratory play before moving on to other areas, as this is a foundation for other play skills.

Exploratory Play

Exploratory play helps children make sense of their surroundings and makes for more effective learning through play.

Opportunities to explore natural materials, household objects, mirrors etc. help children to learn about the world around them. Multi-sensory resources such as treasure baskets, messy play, vibration toys, musical instruments and light toys stimulate the child and provide sensory input to help the child process their environment. Cause and effect toys such as a Jack-in-the-box or switch-activated toy help the child to develop self-awareness and understand they can exert some control over their environment.

Many children with SEND take more time to develop exploratory play skills, and may also need support to move on to other play experiences.



Encouraging a Wider Range of Play Skills

If a child is observed engaging in a particular type of play (e.g. exploring), it is then up to the practitioner to consider how they set up environments and situations to promote the development of the next stage of play (e.g. pretending).

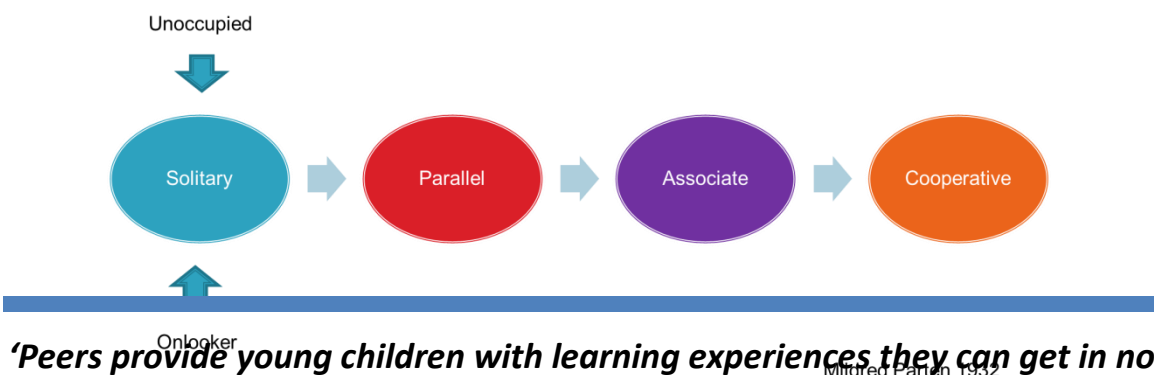
We can help children to develop their play skills by:

- ✓ Creating lots of opportunities for a range of play
- ✓ Tuning into the child's interests and following their lead
- ✓ Modelling ways to extend play
- ✓ Commenting on what children are doing
- ✓ Offering a wide range of resources and environments

SUPPORTING CHILDREN TO SHARE PLAY

Shared play is important for relationship building, communication, cooperation and goal setting. The development of social play moves through stages until eventually it reaches fully cooperative play.

Sharing Play with Others



‘Peers provide young children with learning experiences they can get in no other way. Because peers interact on an equal footing, they must keep a conversation going, cooperate, and set goals in play. With peers, children form friendships—special relationships marked by attachment and common interests’

Infants, Children, and Adolescents: Berk and Meyers 2015

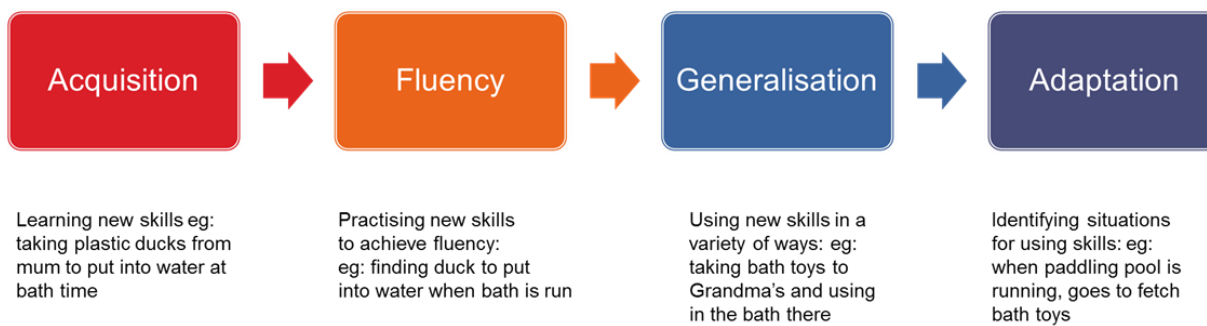
Support may be needed to help children with SEND move through these stages and some may be resistant to sharing play. Structured opportunities for shared play may need to be created, with a small steps approach being used to move the child forwards with their social development.

- Start with play the child enjoys, but is not obsessive about
- Adult offers an appropriate model of shared play
- Encourage gradual acceptance of playing alongside others first
- Create situations where other children can help
- Once shared play begins, help children negotiate and communicate if needed

In addition, visual support may be helpful to facilitate sharing and turn taking e.g., my turn/your turn pointer charts, wait cards, etc. Any attempts to interact, take turns and share should be praised in an appropriate manner for the particular child.

GENERALISING PLAY SKILLS

The aim of any teaching is to help someone learn, to enable them to do something they could not previously do. Ideally, the newly learned behaviour will be shown independently, in appropriate situations, with confidence and with competence. If we are trying to ensure that the teaching we offer results in this effective learning then we need to understand how people learn. To help us do this, we can look at the stages through which we all pass as we learn a new skill, at whatever age. The process of learning can be sub-divided into stages or levels, as illustrated in the diagram below:



Children with SEND can sometimes get 'stuck' in their play and may need support to broaden and generalise their skills. If we are to ensure that the learning of children with SEND is effective, then we have to build in opportunities for **practice** and **generalisation**. It may be more difficult to motivate the child (carrying out the skill may, for example, require more physical effort from the child) and it may be necessary to provide opportunities for practice over a longer period. In addition, it may be necessary to teach the child to generalise from one activity or setting to another in a way that would not be necessary for a child without such learning difficulties.

The importance of play as a way of supporting learning and providing regular, enjoyable opportunities for children to practice and generalise newly learned skills cannot be overemphasized. It is essential that our work with children promotes every child's right to play.

"You have the right to play"

Article 31 in the UNESCO Convention on the Rights of the Child

SUMMARY

- Play is crucially important in the Early Years as it underpins learning and all aspects of development
- Child-led play is central to the EYFS and the Portage Model
- Practitioners may need to use additional strategies to help children with SEND develop play skills, share play and generalise skills.

