

PLAY AND LEARNING

WE

WANT

TO PLAY



PlayBoard
WORKING FOR THE CHILD'S RIGHT TO PLAY

POSITION PAPER

PLAY AND LEARNING

“ *Play in the main channel through which knowledge of the world flows* ”
(Hostler, 1959)

PlayBoard and many other organisations and individuals working with children and young people would recognise that academic achievement is only one element of education and learning.

Through play, the holistic development of the child is encouraged. This includes their emotional development, the forming and enhancement of social relationships, intellectual and creative stimulation, the opportunity to explore both their culture and creativity and to physically progress ... and surely this is what education and learning should also strive to achieve.

Northern Ireland has the youngest school starting age in Europe. This, coupled with increased pressure for academic achievement outcomes within even the primary schools in Northern Ireland, has created a curriculum that has not provided for social, creative and emotional development. As a result, quite often children are emerging from the formal education system with low self-esteem and limited choices. For children whose lives are already impacted upon by poverty, the outcomes may be devastating.

“ *The opportunity to develop through activities which promote the process of play is as essential to the full and healthy development of children as taught learning. Yet it is a form of learning which is largely ignored and unrecognised.* ”
(Heseltine and Holborn, 1987)

Play is central to the development of the child from learning about colours and textures to roles and relationships. It is through play that children are able to test out their theories, take risks and develop new skills.

Primary school-age years are a time where horizons and opportunities are often fast developing, when friendships and peers take on increasing significance. Children are establishing their identities and learning about the needs and aspirations of others. It is an imaginative and creative period as children strive to discover

PLAY AND LEARNING

and make sense of the world about them, developing key skills that enable them to develop their potential and take their place in the world as adults.

That is why it is so important that an environment of positive and varied play opportunities is created to complement the formal education sector - within schools themselves and after school through the youth service and play provision. PlayBoard is committed to developing new approaches to creating learning environments where children learn through play, through experience and have fun.

Whilst play in its own right does constantly add to academic ability, it also goes some way to redressing the holistic development imbalance of children within the formal education sector. Where play is utilised within the classroom setting, the learning is experiential rather than taught and is flexible to the individual child's ability and learning style.

Through our membership of the European Network for School-Age Childcare (ENSAC), PlayBoard has studied learning and play throughout Europe. The agency is aware that in Sweden, children do not start formal education until the age of seven and do not sit at a desk before the age of nine; playworkers and teachers work side-by-side with equal status. Recent comparative analysis between Swedish and British schoolchildren at eleven years demonstrated that Swedish children were equal to or slightly ahead of their British counterparts intellectually and academically. The Swedish government also introduced a school ground development scheme a few years ago in recognition of the value of utilising the natural environment for learning and play.

“ *Play is a tool for learning and practitioners who acknowledge and appreciate this can, through provision, interaction and intervention in children's play, ensure progression, differentiation and relevance in their development.* ”

(Moyle J, 1996)

Playwork NVQs are now recognised throughout the UK as the professional qualification more appropriate for working with primary school-age children during out-of-school hours. Playwork has its own curriculum which includes core areas of developing the senses, identity, concepts and elements. These are the key ingredients for a holistic programme for children's learning and complement the taught education system.

PlayBoard therefore calls for education and learning to be viewed as a process for holistic development, encouraging creativity and supporting the child and young person to achieve his/her fullest potential in life.



59-65 York Street
Belfast BT15 1AA
Tel: 028 9080 3380
Fax:: 028 9080

E-Mail: kidsplay@playbrd.dnet.co.uk