

The Importance of Learning through Play - A little bit of history

One of the main influences on the theory of play was the work of Frederick Froebel (1782-1852).

Froebel promoted the child-centred approach and many of his ideas have shaped what is now known as free flow play. He believed that children needed real experiences and to be physically active, he recognised that there was a link between play and learning. Action songs and rhymes were valued as important and seen as stimulation to further development. He also valued the importance of outdoor play and natural materials in the environment. Froebel founded the first kindergarten and has significantly influenced play theorists through history and continues to do so today.

Susan Issacs was influenced by Froebel's ideas and saw the value of play as a means to enable children the freedom to balance their ideas, feelings and relationships. She recognized the importance of fantasy play and all play was seen as vital to holistic development. Issacs also valued the importance of parents as the child's first educators.

Margaret McMillan (1860-1931)

Again saw the importance of **active learning**. She saw play as a means of expression and application of knowledge and understanding. She was one of the main pioneers in nursery education, which emphasized the importance of healthy nutrition as well as physical and emotional well being.

Today, the work of Tina Bruce, Cathy Nutbrown and Chris Athey has been important in influencing current thinking and curriculum development in Early Childhood Education. **Play** is highlighted as an integral part of the curriculum, and importance is placed on the way in which adults can facilitate children's learning through providing opportunities for play, and where play, is freely chosen by the child.

The Scottish Curriculum for Excellence emphasises the importance of play and that: "*Play is freely chosen, personally directed, intrinsically motivated behaviour that actively engages the child*" (*Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2010*).

Play comes from within a child and free play is a vital part of learning and experience. Through play, children can *“wallow in ideas, feelings and relationships”* and *“become technically proficient,”* Tina Bruce 2010. The relationship between play and healthy brain development has been widely researched and recognized.