The importance of Physical Development and why it is a prime area of the revised EYFS

*(Statutory Guidance, Revised EYFS, 2012)*

Physical development involves providing opportunities for young children to be active and interactive; and to develop their co-ordination, control, and movement. Children must also be helped to understand the importance of physical activity, and to make healthy choices in relation to food.

1) Moving and handling
2) Health and self-care

Reminder about child development (which is not mentioned in much detail in the revised EYFS)

"From About.com - Physical Growth"

Physical development in children follows a directional pattern:

- **Large muscles develop before small muscles.** Muscles in the body’s core, legs and arms develop before those in the fingers and hands. Children learn how to perform gross (or large) motor skills such as walking before they learn to perform fine (or small) motor skills such as drawing.
- **The centre of the body develops before the outer regions.** Muscles located at the core of the body become stronger and develop sooner than those in the feet and hands.
- **Development goes from the top down, from the head to the toes.** This is why babies learn to hold their heads up before they learn how to crawl."
Looking at your observations of your children and the non-statutory Development Matters Grids on **Physical Development** and think about:

1) What do you **observe** your children doing physically in your indoor and outdoor environment?
   - Do they have choices about where to be active?
   - Do they have open ended materials and equipment to explore?
   - Do you have particular concerns about the physical development of any your children?

2) What do the **adults do** to support your children’s physical development
   - How do they support the physical development of all of your children?
   - Do the adults all have the same approach and attitude to what is safe or not, allowed or not?

3) What do you provide for the children in your learning **environment** in the indoors and outdoors?
   - Does it provide a genuine challenge for your children physically?
   - Do the experiences you provide promote all round physical development? Are there any experiences which are missing that you would like to offer?
Useful resources linked to physical development

From “Explorations, Early Learning”
http://explorationsearlylearning.com/

https://www.facebook.com/ExplorationsEarlyLearning

Two interesting researchers
1) Jan White

http://janwhitenaturalplay.wordpress.com/
A really interesting blog about the importance of being outdoors for children’s physical development.
From booklet accompanying the Siren Films video “Two year olds outdoors”

“When Tristan pushes vehicles up the slope and feels the exhilarating fast motion down it, and when he falls through space as he jumps off the wall followed by feeling the resistance of the firm ground, his experiences feed both this schematic exploration and provide excellent stimulation for neurological development of the proprioceptive sense (body awareness) and the vestibular sense (balance and coordination)” - Jan White

Wikipedia: Proprioception from Latin proprius, meaning “one’s own”, “individual” and perception, is the sense of the relative position of neighbouring parts of the body and strength of effort being employed in movement. (Body awareness)

The Free Dictionary: Vestibular sense - a sensory system located in structures of the inner ear that registers the orientation of the head, the ability to sense the position and location and orientation and movement of the body and its parts (Balance and coordination)

Natural play – Philosophy and approach

Enabling children’s natural ways of growing, learning and thriving with the help of the natural world

Working as mentor with Sandfield Natural Play Centre, we are together developing an approach to learning outdoors that draws from a comprehensive philosophy about young children, how they experience life and learning, and how the natural outdoor world supports them to thrive and grow. The elements of this philosophy are outlined below. If you are interested in a study visit to multi award-winning Sandfield Natural Play Centre in Knowsley, near Liverpool,
please contact me or the owner, Sue Scott, at Suzanne@sandfield.org.uk (tel 0151 426 6262).

A Natural Curriculum

At the heart of our thinking is a belief that children’s own need and drive to learn can be trusted. The young child’s body and mind has its own developmental agenda and processes, which they should be enabled to find and follow. We want to highlight and trust their natural play drives, aiming for a truly child led curriculum.

The Natural World

We believe that children need the natural world and that it looks after them. They are biologically designed to be in it and therefore thrive by being in intimate, everyday contact with it. It provides the most generous and powerful learning environment, with great affordance for child-led learning and development.

Embodied learning

Natural Play stresses the importance of physicality, movement and doing. Children under three have an especially great need of sensory stimulation and movement, and this is best found in the natural outdoor environment. We seek to provide a multi-sensory and movement-rich environment and curriculum.

Child-paced learning

We understand that everything children take note of and want to do has value and is valuable to them. Young children need time to think, to repeat, to return to things and to come back later to something that has interest for them. We want to develop the notion of ‘slowness’ and value long periods of time together outdoors (in clothing that keeps us comfortable and safe).
Adventure and adventuring.

We want children (and adults) to be able to find excitement and a sense of adventure, venturing into unknown but secure enough places in the imagination and discovering new things about themselves and their world. The natural world offers a strongly adventurous environment.

Risk is an intelligent behaviour

Children need to develop a strong inner sense of competence and agency. We want to be able to provide freedom, flexibility and rich experiences within a framework of safety. We want children to develop a ‘growth mindset’ that enables them to have a go, go for it and try again and know that ‘I can do it’, emotionally, physically, cognitively and socially. For this to happen, the adults supporting them must also feel capable and confident in this environment.

Authentic experiences

Young children must have real, direct, hands-on opportunities that are experiential, meaningful and worthwhile to them. Natural Play focuses on what matters to the children – what their big ideas are and what they want to know – and enables these enquires to emerge over time. It focuses on ideas and theory-making (how do things work), through experiences such as growing and eating, schematic play, taking things apart, caring for the setting’s environment, and interacting with humans and nature.

Imagination, creativity, science

These are at the heart of children’s natural play. The pleasure of finding things out and of imagining what might be is part of being human and a major purpose of childhood. We see children as scientists and creators at the same time, with feelings and thinking woven inextricably together. Natural Play seeks to feed children’s curiosity, fascination, wonder, awe and to provide satisfaction of their deep drive to learn and make meaning.
Belonging and Caring

Of great importance in Natural Play is a focus on well-being, being together, being able to trust and rely on others, having a voice and developing a deep sense of belonging both to the group and to the natural world. Through attention to the layers of caring from the inner child outwards, we aim to build foundations of a desire and need to care for the self, society and the planet.

Enabling adults to enable children.

A major task for the management team is to build the confidence, self-belief and competence of all practitioners in the setting. Our aim is that staff feel good about themselves, consulted and truly part of the team. We want them to become eager to learn about the children and their play, and enthusiastic co-learners with the children.

Parental engagement and involvement

It is vital that we create and maintain strong dialogue and equality with parents/carers in the partnership of providing care and education for their children. We will develop strategies to involve families with the vision and development of Natural Play at Sandfield, including them as much as we can in the journey of the centre.

(C) Jan White, Early Childhood Natural Play & Suzanne Scott, Sandfield Natural Play Centre, Sept 2010
Coordination problems reflect a child’s experience of his or her body in space.

Movement is a child’s first language. Through movement, he explores the world, gains a sense of his own position in space, develops an awareness of his own body map and learns to co-ordinate eyes and body together. His body is also his first vehicle of expression; posture and gesture tell a story of their own, long before fluent speech develops. Body language stays with us for the remainder of our lives. The most advanced level of movement is the ability to stay totally still. To remain still requires whole muscle groups to operate together in perfect synchrony with the balance mechanism. The child in reception class or year 1 who is unable to sit still may be demonstrating that he does not yet have sufficient control over his body to sublimate movement, and focus attention on other tasks.

Movement and language are linked in the early stages of language development. Ask a two-and-a-half-year-old to say “hand” and he will usually wave his hand as he says it. Only as a child starts to develop automatic control of movement, can language emerge as an independent skill. Why are these things so important for learning at school?
It used to be thought that primitive reflexes could not persist in their crude form amongst normal children. A growing body of research (Rider, 1973, Bender, 1976, Wilkinson, 1994), now suggests that vestiges of early reflex patterns can and do persist amongst some normal schoolchildren, and continue to hamper these children in the development of basic skills. An inadequate vocabulary of voluntary movement patterns will limit a child’s expressive abilities. Children who are motor-impaired find it difficult to integrate their personalities into the environment because they do not have a complete repertoire of appropriate reactions. Lack of automatisation in motor skills will impede cognitive processing, so that a child may know what he wants to say, but be unable to combine the motor actions of writing with fluent expression of ideas.

Movement helps to develop spatial awareness, directionality and control of balance. The balance mechanism is linked to the muscles that control eye movements via a circuit called the vestibular-oculo-reflex arc. Children with poor balance frequently also show impaired eye movements which in turn can affect reading ability and simple tasks such as aligning columns for calculation in maths.

Less and less is movement a part of our children’s daily lives. From birth they often go into moulded baby seats for their waking hours. Whilst these are invaluable for the modern mother, they should never replace the floor as the first exercise ground. Crawling represents a crucial stage in the integration of motor patterns, for in the process of crawling the infant learns to synchronise this balance, motor, kinetic and visual systems for the first time. Then hand-eye co-ordination involved in crawling is carried out at exactly the same visual distance that a child will use to read and write.

The two-to-three-year-old needs plenty of time to run, to hop, skip and jump; to roll and tumble. These activities help to prime the motor system in preparation for fine muscle skills. Hours spent in front of the television are hours of passive learning – they do not integrate new material into existing systems. The child under the age of 7 learns best when he relates physically and emotionally to material. The school-age child needs time to move as well as time to sit still – not all difficulties...
with reading, writing and attention reside in the head; some are linked to the body.

What are the foundations of school readiness?

Sally Goddard Blythe

In making recommendations for policies in the future we need to remain aware, that although early years education can help to support children’s growth and development, particularly for children growing up in deprived areas and impoverished environments, “too much, too soon” can also stunt children’s development in other ways. Children are not miniature adults. Development of the brain and nervous system in the early years takes place in the context of the physical world and is not a purely cognitive process.

How do the areas of gross motor readiness, oral language skills, emotional readiness and possession of basic pre-math and phonetic skills develop in the first three years?

Knowledge of the world begins with physical interaction with the environment and social engagement with consistent and responsive caregivers. While maturation is an intrinsic process it unfolds in the context of physical relationships and is entrained through the primary medium of movement through physical activity. Ray Barsch described the child in the first years of life as a “terranaut” – a space explorer – who must learn how to function in a gravity based environment in order to develop good control over the body. Body control is acquired as posture, balance and coordination develop, and these fundamental skills are needed to sit still, manipulate a writing
instrument, command the sequential eye movements involved in reading, catching a ball and even judging space and distance. In other words, physical control of the body is an essential precursor to learning success. There is a danger that if children are forced into sedentary and primarily cognitive activities before these skills are in place, they may experience early failure or under-achieve in the classroom later on.

Physical activity is the “bread and butter” of the first three years of life. The sense of balance – the master of movement control – is learned through rolling, crawling, tottering on two feet, falling and learning how not to fall again: through running, jumping, climbing, swinging and sliding. As a child learns confidence in control of the body, he also develops a sense of security and self-regulation. Movement is a child’s first language, and a child learns about the world with his body before he learns with his brain. In maximising the potential of the first three years, the body is the primary learning tool.

The foundations for oral language skills have their origins in life before birth. The unborn child is able to hear a limited range of muffled sounds, which roughly correspond to the range of the human voice from as early as 24 weeks after conception. The voice that has most influence before birth is that of the mother because it is sensed as both an internal and external force, and introduces the child to the patterns, intonations, rhythms and cadences of his mother tongue – the music of language. It will take one to two years after birth for the infant to develop recognisable speech and speech development is highly dependent on having sufficient experience of language. First time mothers are sometimes shy of talking to a baby who they insist does not understand a word they say and does not talk back, but children learn to use language through being talked to, through imitation, through listening, reflecting back and being listened to. Electronic media cannot develop speech in the same way that another human being can, because it is not a flexible “listener” and does not respond to what the infant has to say. Oral language skills develop through dialogue not through the monologue of pre-programmed background noise. Written language was the product of an oral tradition, in which information was passed on through the telling of stories and singing of
songs. In much the same way that our ancestors developed written symbols to represent sounds, so the young child must learn to discriminate between different sounds and build up a memory of sounds before he can translate those and sounds to and from visual symbols on the page (writing and reading). The first lesson in reading is not decoding letters and words on a page, but listening and repeating the sounds of language through nursery rhymes, songs, action games and listening to stories. If parents want to optimise learning potential in the early years, it is best done through the joy of shared activities and the process of play.

Maths concepts are also built on an understanding of the concrete world. Modern calculus began with the use of small stones as counting instruments; spatial awareness needed to understand geometric forms and relationships begins with a physical understanding of what shapes are – the similarity between an orange, a ball and a circle – and the simple arithmetical concepts of addition and subtraction, multiplication and division are rooted in an understanding of the reversal of processes. Once again, it is the physical world which provides the basis for this conceptual understanding.

While many parents in competitive western technological societies are anxious to start their children on the road to academic success as early as possible, the foundations for that success are rooted in a child’s physical competence in the world. Yes, a child learns more in the first three years of life than it will during all its years in elementary school, but that learning is literally “child’s play”. In seeking to maximise the potential of the first three years adults must remember the developmental needs of children.