

Northwick Park Primary and Nursery Academy

Gun, weapons and Superhero play policy

Introduction

Most children enjoy engaging in imaginative play that relates to, and makes sense of, the world that they live in. For lots of children (particularly boys) this imaginative play contains a strong element of weapon and Super Hero re-enactment. Re-enacting weapon use is a universal language of play for children and usually results in high levels of engagement for the children actively involved in it.

Images and ideas gleaned from the media are common starting points in boys' play and may involve characters with special powers or weapons. Adults can find this type of play particularly challenging and have a natural instinct to stop it. This is not necessary as long as practitioners help the boys to understand and respect the rights of other children and to take responsibility for the resources and environment. As the EYFS states:

"Value play which is based on characters, such as superheroes who may mean a lot to children, even if you do not appreciate them yourself!" (EYFS card 4.3 Learning and Development)

Creating situations so that boys' interests in these forms of play can be fostered through healthy and safe risk-taking will enhance every aspect of their learning and development.

(DCSF 2007)

Rational

Historically, this type of play has often been banned from early year's settings, in the belief that it encourages aggression or violence. This ban, as well as being difficult to enforce, may well have a negative impact on young children's development, particularly boys.

Recent research and current writing suggests that children learn important lessons by exploring these themes in a safe arena of play, for example,

concepts such as good and evil, life and death, strength and power, gender and identity.

We have developed this policy in order to support practitioners and parents to respond appropriately to superhero and weapon play. If there are concerns about aggressive or threatening behaviour, we will refer to the behaviour Policy.

'We should see superhero play not as a disruption to be prevented but as another gateway to learning'

Penny Holland (2003).

This policy has been inspired by an interest in the role of popular culture and its effect on many of the children in our early years setting - most particularly superhero play. Over the years, many early years' practitioners have expressed interest in and also concern about the pre-occupation of some of the children, especially boys, with this type of play which often involves weapons and fighting. Adults are often unsure of the value of this media-influenced play, how to manage it effectively or how to join in as play partners. Much has been written about this issue as part of a wider debate about gender differences and boys' underachievement. This has led to a greater awareness of the implications on learning of different learning styles and rates of development of boys and girls. As a result, many practitioners have decided that banning or even discouraging superhero and weapon play disadvantages those boys who are so engrossed by it. Perhaps most importantly superhero play reminds us that bridging the gap between the culture of home and the early years setting is a key strategy in supporting the emotional well-being of all children.

At Leigh Beck Infant and Nursery Academy we feel it is important to create a whole school approach of which staff, children, parents, governors and other agencies have a clear understanding. This policy is a formal statement of our approach to children's weapon and Super Hero imaginative play

Aims

The commitments linked to the principle of Learning and Development help us to understand how children learn actively through play, first-hand experiences, creativity and critical thinking. As children learn and develop, they *"actively build their own meanings by applying, revising and reapplying what they know."* (EYFS card 4.2 *Active Learning in depth*) Boys often appear to be more active learners than girls, but whether or not there is a gender divide in this respect, active learners need opportunities to make their own decisions and have control over their learning to keep their interest and to develop their creativity.

Equal Opportunities and Inclusion

The children and parents are actively involved in the education process at Leigh Beck Infant and Nursery Academy and their perceptions about Weapon and Super Hero Play are explored and valued.

The staff will regularly evaluate the impact that actively fostering this element of role play has on the environment, the cohort as a whole and identified groups of children and individuals.

If required a range of support strategies will be put in place to ensure that this style of play does not have any negative impact.

Staff are sensitive to the cultural / family background of the child, including whether the child's family has experienced violence, moved to Britain to escape war etc. The key person should be proactive in gently explaining the play to families who may be sensitive to it and discuss any issues that may arise from it, while recognising that children who have been in aggressive situations may welcome the play as an outlet for pent up feelings. If staff are unsure they should refer to the safeguarding policy and / or speak to a senior member of staff.

Principles that underpin the policy

The principles that underpin our transition policy are

- ✱ Approaches to teaching and learning in role play should reflect the interests of the children and not exclusively those of the adults
- ✱ Planning for role play in the environment should be based upon assessment information from the observed play of the current cohort.
- ✱ Our setting will acknowledge the positive aspects of the character of the Superhero and highlight the negative aspects of weapon use and physical violence at a level that is appropriate to the age and needs of the children. This will be mainly done through story, drama and appropriate discussion.
- ✱ Styles of teaching and learning should meet the needs of children and not pre-conceived notions of what is or is not appropriate role play.
- ✱ All children's emotional welfare, wellbeing and involvement should be assessed in relation to this style of play.
- ✱ Children should enjoy the play opportunity.
- ✱ The Weapon/Superhero play should motivate and challenge children.
- ✱ The creation of an effective culture of Weapon/Superhero play in any setting takes time, and is a process rather than an event.
- ✱ Effective and engaging play is about our setting fitting the interests of the child, not the child fitting the setting.
- ✱ On-going opportunities for quality imaginative play are not overlooked or left to chance, but thought about and planned in advance.

Initial preparations

All staff across our setting must be aware of the thinking that underpins this policy.

- ✱ All staff to observe children's individual and group imaginative play within the setting identifying themes that result in high level engagement.
- ✱ Within planning meetings staff will discuss the on-going development and management of the settings approach to Weapon/Superhero Play. These discussions will take place on an informal basis at the end of a session as needed and be included in planning times.
- ✱ Resources and enhancements (including appropriate construction materials) are put in place to specifically support this style of play.
- ✱ This policy will be shared with all staff and managing/governing bodies as its content will impact on other adults approaches to Weapon/Superhero play in other areas of the setting.

Creating an appropriate environment

The types of play that boys and girls engage in is enhanced or diminished by the quality of the learning environment inside and out. The EYFS card, *Supporting Every Child*, flags up that: *"Children need sensitive, knowledgeable adults who know when and how to engage their interests and how to offer support at different times."* (card 3.2) Practitioners must take responsibility for ensuring the learning environment is planned to inspire, challenge and intrigue every child. However, sometimes practitioners find the chosen play of boys more difficult to understand and value than that of girls. They may choose activities in which adults involve themselves least, or play that involves more action and a greater use of the available space, especially outdoors.

"Some boys who are at risk of becoming disaffected at a very young age have shown significant improvements if their learning takes place outside."

Opportunities which reflect all six areas of learning outdoors must be available.” (Bilton et al 2005.)

Practitioners need to be aware of the impact of both the emotional and physical environment on the well-being and self-esteem of all children:

Practitioners will:

- * involve themselves as much in the boys' choices of role play and learning experiences as the girls'
- * see the physical environment as one of the most powerful resources through which children can learn ,and carefully plan and monitor how it is used.
- * value the outdoor as much as the indoor environment, thinking creatively about the environment and how it can support Weapon/Superhero role play
- * experiences and activities we have on offer ensure we meet the needs of boys as well as girls
- * are aware that sometimes an interest may be sparked by something immediate in the environment, or something much more long term, such as interest in Weapon/Superhero play.
- * ensure role-play areas incorporate boys' play themes allowing children to fetch and move resources from one place to another, to enhance their play themes
- * ensure all children take equal responsibility in caring for the environment of the setting, tidying up and looking after equipment and each other, fostering a sense of social responsibility.

Weapon / Gun Play Guidelines

- ✳ We will not provide bought toy guns and weapons, however children may make weapons from
- ✳ creative materials or use representations e.g. from Lego
- ✳ No touching when 'shooting'
- ✳ If children cannot follow the rules then we will remove the weapon and use our usual conflict resolution and behaviour strategies as detailed in our behaviour policy
- ✳ We will have discussions about alternatives to hurting others / using weapons
- ✳ We will have discussions, based on reality or imagination, about how to help those who are hurt e.g. medical people who help us, magic potions to make them better

Assessment, Recording and Reporting

Leigh Beck Infant and Nursery Academy will ensure that, through training and development, all staff are aware of the impact of both the emotional and physical environment on the well-being and self-esteem of all children:

- ✳ ensure that there are regular opportunities for 'unplanned' role play to allow for children's self-expression and staff observation.
- ✳ monitor and record and evaluate the positive aspects of the play that they see, incorporating preferences and themes into future planning
- ✳ ensure that the physical environment both indoor and outdoor contains resources that will support and promote children's play.
- ✳ provide a variety of resources , some that replicate actual objects alongside others that will be open ended and ambiguous to allow for individual interpretation and foster an approach of imagination and creativity.

- ✱ be aware that the success of some themes and enhancements will differ between cohorts/groups of children, therefore plan to the needs of the current cohort and not necessarily deliver previous plans without evaluation and amendment.

Partnership with parents

Some parents feel anxious about superhero and weapon play and worry it may make their children more boisterous or aggressive in their play. We acknowledge this fear and want to ensure that all parents / carers feel confident and comfortable to support their child's learning through superhero and weapon play. We will do this by providing an 'open door' policy where parents / carers are always welcome to observe / join in with superhero and weapon play activities around the nursery and speak to staff. If parents are concerned by weapon or superhero play, then they are asked to speak to a member of staff and may then be referred onto the Deputy Head, Head of School or Executive Head teacher. Their concerns will be taken seriously and the issue will be addressed.

Continuing Professional Development

- ✱ The staff in the setting know what the Development Matters and Early Years Foundation Stage Profile contain and how to interpret the scale points in relation to role play.
- ✱ All Staff are confident in making assessments through the observation of children.
- ✱ Staff plan opportunities for role play collaboratively checking that continuity and progressions are evident and based on children's preferences and interests.

Further Reference

ABC Does...Weapon and Superhero play policy

Alistair Bryce Clegg

Bang Bang! Gun Play and Why we need it

Diane Rich

We don't do Guns here.

Penny Holland

Engaging Boys in Early Years

Islington Council

 This policy was written by Mrs T Smith

It will be reviewed by the Foundation Stage Manager, Head teacher and Governing body in two years or earlier if necessary

Review date - September 2018