

Holistic development, education and Forest School

Development differs from *individual* to individual, and often development in one area is deeply *integrated* with or dependent on development in other areas.

Areas of development

1. Personal, Social and Emotional Development

Successful personal, social and emotional development is critical for very young children in all aspects of their lives and gives them the best opportunity in all other areas of learning. It is critical that settings provide the experiences and support to enable children to develop a positive sense of themselves. This area of learning is about emotional well-being, knowing who you are and where you fit in and feeling good about yourself. It is also about developing respect for others, social competence and a positive disposition to learn.

Effective teaching requires

- acting as a positive role model (both in what you say and what you do)
- responding to children's interest and needs
- planning activities that are challenging and achievable
- using communication and language to support children's personal, social and emotional development.

2. Physical Development

Physical development is about improving skills of co-ordination, control, manipulations and movement. It helps children gain confidence in what they can do and enables them to feel the positive benefits of being health and active. Effecting physical development helps children to develop a positive sense of well-being.

Effective teaching includes:

- planning activities that offer appropriate physical challenges
- provide sufficient space and time for the activities
- introducing the language of movement to children alongside the activities

Physical development is inseparable from all other aspects of development because children learn through being active and interactive. Children use all their senses to learn about the world around them and make connections between new information and what they already know.

3. Communication, Language and Literacy

Through interactive play, negotiating and planning activities children use a wealth of rich language and new vocabulary. Communication, language and literacy depend on learning a number of key skills together with learning, confidence, opportunities,

encouragement, support and disposition to use them. This area of learning includes communication, speaking and listening in different situations and for different purposes, being read a wide range of books and reading simple texts and writing for a variety of purposes.

The development and use of communication and language is at the heart of young children's learning. The ability to communicate gives children the capacity to participate more fully in their society.

Effective teaching includes:

- observing children and planning the context in which they best develop their speaking and listening, as well as their understanding of reading and writing
- valuing talk and alternative forms of communication (signing, facial expressions and gestures)
- interaction and expressions
- model language use as a tool for thinking

4. Creative Development

Creative development is fundamental to successful learning. Being creative enables children to make connections between one area of learning and another and so extend their understanding. This area of learning includes, art, music, dance, role play and imaginative play.

Effective teaching includes:

- stimulating environment in which creativity, originality and expressiveness are valued
- a wide range of activities offered that children can respond to by using the many senses
- sufficient time is given to explore, develop ideas and finish working at their ideas
- opportunities to express their ideas through a wide range of representation
- working alongside creative, sensitive and responsive adults

5. Knowledge and Understanding of the World

In this area children are developing the crucial knowledge, skills and understanding that help them make sense of the world. This forms the foundations for later work in science, design and technology, history, geography and information and communication technology (ICT).

Effective teaching includes:

- activities that encourage exploration, observation, problem-solving, predictions, critical thinking, decision making and discussion
- wide range of activities to stimulate interest and curiosity
- support in helping children communicate and record orally and in other ways

6. Mathematical Development

Mathematical development depends on becoming confident and competent in learning and using key skills. This area of learning includes counting, sorting,

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matching, seeking patterns, making connections, recognising relationships and working with numbers, shapes, space and measure. Mathematical understanding should be developed through stories, song, games and imaginative play.

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Holistic Development and Forest School

The term 'Holistic', when referring to human development, comes from the idea of 'holism' which emerged in the 1970's in educational thinking - that things need to be understood as a whole.

The Oxford English Dictionary quotes "...characterized by comprehension of the parts of something as intimately interconnected and explicable only by reference to the whole."

It is possible to analyse human development under separate aspects, such as physical, intellectual, social and emotional development but all these aspects interact with each other in the life of real people to comprise holistic development.

There are a number of views expressed by philosophers, thinkers and educators over the centuries about holistic development.

One of the world renowned thinkers on education and human development was Krishnamurti (1895 – 1986). He espoused the individual as one who should see him/herself as an integrated whole and unique and we are only truly free when we see ourselves as a 'global citizen' – as part of the human race.

"The highest function of education is to bring about an integrated individual who is capable of dealing with life as a whole." (Krishnamurti, 1964)

He saw love of the world, and higher deeper thinking combined with 'freedom' of the mind as essential to whole human development. He did not expound any philosophy or religion, but rather talked of the things that concern all of us in our everyday life the problems of living in modern society with its violence and corruption; of the individual's search for security and happiness; and the need for mankind to free itself from inner burdens of fear, anger, hurt, sorrow, and so on. He unravelled with great precision the subtle workings of the human mind and pointed to the need for bringing to our daily life a deeply meditative and religious quality (<http://www.krishnamurticentre.org.uk/teachings>)

Many of the The Swiss humanitarians - Johann Pestalozzi, Rudolf Steiner; the American Transcendentalists - Thoreau, Emerson and Alcott; the founders of "progressive" education - Francis Parker and John Dewey – and pioneers such as Maria Montessori, among others, all insisted that education should be understood as the art of cultivating the moral, emotional, physical, psychological and spiritual dimensions of the developing child. All saw contact with the 'real', and often the natural, world as something essential to child development.

Ron Miller, a contemporary educationalist, sees a holistic way of thinking as one that encompasses and integrates multiple layers of meaning and experience rather than defining human possibilities narrowly. Every child is more than a future employee; every person's intelligence and abilities are far more complex than his or her scores on standardized tests. In his book 'What are Schools for' (1997) he demonstrates that holistic education, grounded in a fundamentally different worldview, reflects very different assumptions about education and schooling than the common western view, integrating the emotional, physical, psychological and cognitive aspects of child development.

With Forest School being based in a 'real' multisensory world, not bound by subjects, there is more opportunity for integration of all the aspects highlighted above. Working on a simple task such as setting up a house for a woodland creature – be they make believe or real, involves physical (gross and fine) development along with creativity, mathematical, social, communication and even a spiritual aspect regarding 'what is home' – a truly holistic experience not bound by traditional 'school subjects'. Indeed Sara knight has written extensively on what Forest School is and isn't and sees it as a holistic model, agreeing with Ron Miller to an extent, "In the same way, the Forest School experience differs from other forms of outdoor education in that its principle goal is to permanently change the participants for the good, not just to impart a one-off set of information or experiences." (Knight, 2009)

Forest School can be seen as a way of integrating all human attributes and to equip individuals to live a fulfilling life and at the same time rise to life's challenges in a thoughtful and 'whole' global way – as Krishnamurti espoused 'to encourage us all to be truly integrated worldly individuals.'

References and useful websites

Knight, S (2009) *Forest Schools & Outdoor Learning in the Early Years*. Sage publications Ltd, London

Krishnamurti, J (1964) *Think on These Things*. Harper and Row, New York

Miller, Ron (1997). *What Are Schools For? Holistic Education in American Culture, 3rd Edition*. Brandon, VT: Holistic Education Press

Useful websites (accessed 1/12/13)

<http://infed.org/mobi/a-brief-introduction-to-holistic-education>

<http://www.pathsoflearning.net> (Ron Miller)

www.green-changemakers.blogspot.com/2009/06/holistic-education-introduction.html

<http://www.holistic-education.net/about.htm>