

8.10 Weapon and Superhero Play Policy

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 health and safe risk-taking will enhance every aspect of their learning and development (DSCF 2007)

Whilst the current Development Matters for the Early Years Foundation Stage does not specifically mention the importance of superheroes, it suggests using the children's interests as a starting point for their creative and literacy journeys.

Rational

At Anthony Roper Preschool and Kindergarten we feel it is important to create a whole setting approach of which staff, children, parents and other agencies have a clear understanding. This policy is a formal statement of our approach to children's weapon and superhero 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 Anthony Roper Preschool and Kindergarten 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.

Principles that underpin the policy

- 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.
- Parents and carers need to feel well informed about and comfortable with the setting's approach to weapon/superhero play and the principles that underpin it.
- Children, parents/carers and staff need to be involved on an equal basis in the formulation and regular review of this policy.
- Effective and engaging play is about our setting fitting the interests of the child, not the child fitting the setting.

- Ongoing 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 and this will be built into our monitoring system to ensure that it is reviewed regularly.

- All staff to observe children's individual and group imaginative play within the setting identifying themes that result in high level engagement.
- Time allocated within planning meetings to discuss the ongoing development and management of the setting's approach to weapon/superhero play.
- Case studies, further reading and research into this type of play is made available for parent, carer and practitioner reference within the setting.
- An appropriate space, both indoor and outdoor, is designated for the development of this style of play.
- Resources and enhancements (including appropriate construction materials) are put in place to specifically support this style of play.
- Arrangements are made for passing on information to parents about how/why the setting will use, manage and enhance weapon/superhero play.
- This policy will be shared with all interested bodies.

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 states under "Characteristics of Effective Learning" that adults should provide enabling environments which "provide stimulating resources which are accessible and open-ended so they can be used, moved and combined in a variety of ways". Also "arrange flexible indoor and outdoor space and resources where children can explore, build, move and role play". 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 chose 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 wellbeing 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 to 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.

Building on what children know and understand

Anthony Roper Preschool and Kindergarten will ensure that, through training and development, all staff are aware of the impact of both the emotional and physical environment on the wellbeing 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

At Anthony Roper Preschool and Kindergarten we encourage parents and carers to be involved by:

- asking parents and carers their opinion on this subject via parentmail
- using feedback to inform planning
- encouraging parents and carers to come in and help in the setting

Continuing Professional Development

- The staff are experienced and understand the importance of their role in enhancing the development of the individual children in their care through their needs and interests and are able to support this in their 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.

This policy was adopted on 26th November 2014

Signed on behalf of the Pre-school
 (Chair Person)

To be reviewed