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I have not used AI in my assignment.

Section 1

Play is believed to be a successful tool to support a child's development holistically, through play children can grow and develop at their own pace, whilst having fun (Unicef, 2018). Play can be adult-led, this can be from setting out instructions and repetitive modelling or leading the child to each activity, however, it can also be child-led, within an engaging environment, this is an opportunity for the child to activate their thinking and imaginative skills to reach a goal or just for open-ended play. A theorist called Montessori believes that play is the starting point for the child's successful future and a way of holistic development for the child. Montessori's approach believes that play is purposeful and meaningful and enables the child to gain many new skills through hands on learning, play is believed to be 'work' to Montessori, the child will not only gain independence, problem-solving and creative skills but also observation skills, which enables them to learn from their peers, they can learn socialisation skills, being able to share with others, empathy and inclusion (Montessori unlimited, 2023). It is important to add there are many types of play, having an understanding of the different types of play is important, it can enable the caregivers to support their child to develop and grow through their early years (Cohen, 2018).

According to Play Wales (2017), social play is a common play type that is used within early years, many practitioners observe social play daily. Social play is where children begin to communicate with one another whilst playing an activity of their choice, this can be indoors or outdoors. It is the practitioner's role to ensure all resources and activities are accessible for the children and to provide the children with the space and a non-judgmental approach, however, to be prepared to support and model if necessary (Play Wales, 2017). There are many activities children may be participating during social play, the activities can include, role-play, this is when children will act out different characters and scenarios using their imagination or life experiences, during role-play the children may choose to set the scene as house, shop, doctors and more, another activity could be team sports or board games, the children will develop the skills to follow rules and work together as a team to achieve their group goal (Good play guide,2025). Within early years Lego therapy can be considered to sit within the 'social play' category, however, it can also link with other

play types too. Lego therapy is a plastic building block activity, the children can create whatever they desire, which opens an opportunity for the child to be creative. During Lego therapy the children would work together and set themselves a role, the builder, the engineer and the supplier, this supports teamwork and communication, and they may also choose to take leadership to allocate the roles (Oxford Health NHS Foundation,2020). According to Therapy focus, (2024) Lego therapy is believed to focus and support the child's social, language and motor skills, this can be achieved throughout the activity (providing and receiving instructions, problem-solving and taking turns). Each of these activities support the child's holistic development, they focus on the child's physical, social, emotional, intellectual and spiritual development. According to a theorist called Mildred Parten, promoting the stages of play influenced by Piaget, social play links with cooperative play, this stage of play begins when the child is 4 and over, this stage of play is when the child has a purpose for participating and shares a common goal with their peers, the interaction becomes more advanced and meaningful (Brodie, 2024).

Exploratory play is type of play to support the child's holistic development, this type of play is when a child will begin to use their senses to explore different materials that have different textures and explore the world around them, when exploring they will see what happens when they interact with the world (Care Learning, 2025). Practitioners within the setting can create an engaging area to promote exploratory play, there are many activities and resources that can be used, these may include, messy play, sand, water, open door policy to allow the children to explore nature, jelly, blended cereal, spaghetti, however, with this type of play it is important to check for allergies in advance. In each of these activities the child will benefit by using their fine and gross motor skills, investigating and curiosity skills and creating an understanding of the world around them (Early Years TV, 2025). According to Brain and Mukherji, (2005) there are six stages of play. The second stage of play is solitary play, this stage of play could link to exploratory play, some may believe this because during exploratory play children begin to explore new materials and this requires the child's concentration but also the child has been driven towards the activity because of their interests. Solitary play ranges from 3 months of age to around 2 years of age, this involves the child playing independently whilst developing

their life skills, such as concentration and the toddler will begin to gain some interests around them. A theorist called Montessori focuses on the engaging environment, allowing the child to access their interests and explore freely without adult interruption, this theory supports solitary play and exploratory play (Care Learning, 2024).

Section 2

During play and transition around the setting it is common that children may rely on the trusted adult for many things, this can be to lead them to play and activities, pass them resources and engage them into play, however, as the child gains confidence they will naturally become more independent and begin to explore the environment, freely choosing what activities they may have an interest in but with no aim, this is called self-directed play (The Montessori school of the Burkshires, 2024). It is important to add that the term 'freely chosen' is used to initiate that the child has not been set a task, there are no rules or set instructions to be followed, the child is free to explore the resources as they wish (Play Wales, 2018).

Self-directed play is important within the child's journey, it supports holistic development, and it is a natural route of creating achievements (The Steiner Connection, 2022). There are many benefits for the child through self-directed play, they can develop their problem-solving skills, independence, leadership by controlling their play and using their imagination when engrossing in amongst the resources. Each skill that is used through self-directed play will help the child to participate and contribute to daily activities in the world, however, it is important to state that throughout self-directed play, learning is embedded.

Although self-directed play is considered to be solely the child, the adults supporting the child's development will have a role to play. To create opportunities and an engaging environment that will allow the child to reach their full potential, it is the adult's responsibility to set out the resources, so they are available for the children to access (Williams cited in Moyles, 2010:83). It is also the adult's role to create freedom for the child to explore, not interrupting their play if they are interacting with the environment, it is also important that the resources and environment that has been set up is enabling for the child to create meaningful play, resources such as

loose parts can be used as a child will use their own imagination with the resources provided (Andrews, 2017). The adult in the setting should support the child through their learning journey, the support can be delivered by facilitating and being inclusive by providing equipment and resources that suit all regardless of their needs or background, an example of this may be, if the child has mobility issues, the adults will need to provide the equipment and risk assessment so that they can access the setting freely using ramps (Care Learning, 2024). It is also important to extend learning, if the child has successfully completed an activity or keeps approaching the same activity then it is the adult's role to change things up to extend their learning for the child to work towards a new goal of development. Finally, observation is a key tool for each adult to use whilst supporting a child through their holistic development in play, being observant to play can help the adult to develop a deeper understanding of the child, enabling them to plan and prepare future activities to support the child and their needs whilst keeping the child's likes and dislikes in consideration (Welsh Government, 2024).

Section 3

Some may suggest that observation is an important tool to be used whilst caring for a child. Observations are complete by making notes on the child whilst they are doing something, it can be anything, this helps the practitioner to build a picture of the child and enable them to plan future activities whilst factoring in the child's interests and ability (Welsh Government, 2024). Through observation educators can navigate the child's prior knowledge to be able to begin extending their learning with adult support (Smidt, 2015). It is important to add that there are many different methods that can be used when observing a child, the methods can be photographs, checklists, learning stories, daily reflections, rating scales and more. It is important to consider the child's safety and confidentiality when it comes to observations, it is the practitioner's role to ask the caregiver for consent to observe their child (Brodie, no date). Observations are usually best when done discreetly, if a child notices that they are being observed they may start to behave different to how they would have otherwise, this is known as 'The Hawthorne effect' (Simply Psychology, 2024).

Observations are useful to identify the child's interests and dislikes, however, observations can help a practitioner to monitor progress and identify any signs of

additional learning needs (ALN), behaviours that may link to trauma or any challenges that may arise within their daily activities, this is an important area for the child especially for their development. Observations are documented pieces of evidence of the child's progress, and these pieces of evidence can be used to access outside agencies support but also to enable planning for internal support for the child's development (Birthto5matters, no date).

A successful method that some practitioner's may use to observe a child is called 'Leuven Scale', this is a scale based observation where the practitioner will rate the child's involvement in their freely chosen activity. The rating is between 1-5, 5 being highly engaged and 1 being the child's involvement is very low (MacRae and Jones, 2020). Leuven scale observation is used to monitor and evidence the child's well-being throughout their activity, this may create an understanding to why the child has had an impact on their involvement, it is believed that if the child's well-being needs are met then the child's engagement and confidence will develop. The Leuven scale method may be used by a well-being practitioner or a practitioner that works closely with the child, the practitioner will focus closely on the child's concentration during the task, energy with the resources or individuals around them, complexity and creativity, facial expression and posture, persistence, reaction time, socially, and satisfaction (Early Years TV,2025).

There are many benefits of using the Leuven scale method, many practitioner's believe the well-being of the child plays a crucial role within their development and engagement, using the Leuven scale practitioner's will be able to identify any signs of unusual behaviours that may be impacting the child's level of engagement, due to each of the observations being documented, the progress can be monitored over time (irresistible learning, no date). It is important to add that whilst well-being is a focus for the Leuven scale method, the child's skills, ability and challenges are taken into consideration. However, there are also some disadvantages to Leuven scale, as each observation needs to be documented and rated for different areas of the observation it can be time consuming, Leuven scale can be inaccurate for children with additional needs, their behaviours may vary due to many factors (Learning Journals, 2011).

Leuven scale is believed to give a holistic view of the child rather than just focusing on one area. The scale method focuses on the child's well-being and engagement allowing practitioners to see the bigger picture of the child's stage of development and what may be affecting it. Leuven scale offers the child opportunity to express their feelings as well as enabling the practitioner to identify what support can be useful for the child to open opportunity for them to progress overtime (early years staffroom, 2025). The Leuven scale focuses on the four purposes, however, it closely links with 'Healthy and Confident individual', the child's well-being is a big piece of the puzzle when observing using the Leuven scale method, the child will be observed for how the face and overcome challenges overtime, they will also be observed for how they engage, gain and retain positive, trusting relationships (Welsh Government,2020).

Section 4

Play is important when observing and assessing as it allows the child to freely explore different resources, materials and interact with them in their own way. The child may develop new interests during play whilst gathering confidence to communicate and share with peers. During play it is usually self-directed, this is when the child will choose with what they play with, who and where to play with it (besio et al.,2018).

Observing children in play allows practitioners to monitor language development, this can be observed when they are socialising with peers or when they interact with what they are playing with. Practitioners can also monitor how the child may respond to certain activities that have been set out, this again could lead to an understanding of why the child avoids a certain task or is delayed in a certain area. Play can involve a group of children; this allows the practitioner to monitor the child's ability to build friendships and how they may communicate with them (early years careers, 2018).

The role of the adult during observations and assessing the child starts by preparing an engaging environment, ensuring the resources are accessible and age appropriate for the child, however, it is good to have different ability resources available for the child to have an opportunity to extend their learning, this will help the adult to understand the child's limits and how they deal with challenges, each

individual will be different (Welsh Government, 2022). The environment being prepared ready for child engagement will prevent adulteration; this will help the practitioner to stand back and observe how the child works independently. However, Adulteration will sometimes need to happen, for example in Wales a daily routine is most likely to be time-scheduled, play-times, lunch time and outdoor play is usually timetabled. Adults can also support by building relationships with the child and understanding the child's background, this will help the adult understand why a child may behave in a certain way or provide reasoning for their triggers (birthto5matters, 2021). It is important that the adult understands what they are looking for during an observation and how they can assess and make future adaptations for the child involved (Birthto5matters, 2021).

According to Howard and McInnes (2013), children that have been isolated away from play opportunities have demonstrated signs of delayed development or divert away from activities, it is then the practitioner's role to provide play interventions to introduce and support play and development for the child. Interventions can include one or more children, sometimes it is the right thing to start off by working 1:1 ratio with the child and then introduce other children into the intervention to promote socialisation. Howard and McInnes believe that the children that engage in play experiences are more confident, happy and focused, however, children that do not participate in play show negative behaviours and easily distracted. It is also believed that adulteration should only take place if necessary or if a child shows play cues to an adult, these can include: verbal communication, the child may ask for some help or ask for the adult to play alongside them (parallel), body language, this can be used for children that are non-verbal or do not have the confidence to communicate verbally, eye contact (children with ALN may use this), proximity or copying (sands, 2013).

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