

Children's Play: Principles and Practise

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Evidence of a clear understanding of the importance of a variety of play types. The significance of holistic play should also be considered (750 words)

Discuss two types of play and how these can be supported in practise

-play therapy

-social play

'Play therapy is a structured, clinical intervention using play to help children process emotions, trauma, and behavior, usually with a trained professional. Social play involves interactive, peer-based activities that build empathy, conflict resolution, and relationship skills in a natural setting'(psychology today, 2025). Through the use of toys, painting, and storytelling, trained professionals use play therapy which is an evidence-based, child-centered approach to assist children manage emotions, trauma, and behavioral challenges in a nonverbal, safe setting. It views play as a child's natural language, enabling them to communicate, investigate, and resolve difficult interior experiences that they might not be able to convey verbally (NIH, 2021). 'Play Therapy is a type of psychotherapy that uses play and art materials to help a child to express themselves, supporting them to understand their world, and be able to cope better with difficulties they have faced in their lives' (littleoaktherapies, 2024).

'Cooperative play is an essential aspect of early childhood development, providing young children with opportunities to engage with others, build relationships, and develop critical life skills' (littlepioneers, 2024). A child's capacity to learn, share ideas, and assign and accept roles in their play will determine how well they can play nicely. Children under the age of four are usually not yet prepared to share toys for the sake of a game, to respect other children's property rights, or to comprehend the significance of game rules and boundaries (healthline, 2020). This can be included in practice by creating small group activities both inside and outside, where children can construct a fort, plant and care for a garden, or rake leaves together outside. Children can also work together to use outdoor toys or playground equipment in ways that guarantee everyone has a chance to play, such as switching between the monkey bars, swings, and slides (healthline, 2020).

Play type what is it? How does the play type support children's holistic development ?

Consider theory/international approach

'Play types can be described as the different behaviours that adults can observe when children are playing' (playscotland, 2026), such as physical play, social play, imaginative play, constructive play, and games with rules. Play types support multiple areas of holistic development for example, through arts and crafts sessions children are constantly learning about different resources and ideas, expressing their creativity and emotions, and developing their fine motor skills while they work on their masterpieces. Additionally, it provides a variety of chances for cognitive development, including the ability to recognize colors, comprehend shapes and patterns, and solve issues, such as finding out how to stick items together. Another example is games and activities in groups where children can improve their cognitive and problem-solving skills, by working on a group puzzle. It also helps children grow emotionally and socially by teaching them about sharing, teamwork, and the value of communication (TeachKloud, 2023). While Lev Vygotsky emphasized the significance of social play for language, cooperation, and learning through interaction, Jean Piaget and other theorists suggested that play promotes cognitive development by enabling children to actively create knowledge (Eden, 2024).

Evidence of a clear understanding of why it is important for children to choose their own play and the importance of the role of the adult in children's play (750 words)

What is self directed play?

Children choose their activities and focus, enabling free reign freedom of expression and open-ended interactions with their environment. Play is initiated, sustained and developed by children, free of adult influence (hub. 2019). Self-directed play is essential for holistic development by providing children the opportunity to explore through play helps them develop self-confidence in their judgment and ideas. They gain confidence in their abilities. They begin to see mistakes as opportunities for growth rather than as failures. By letting children take small risks in a secure environment, play-based learning promotes emotional development. They take pride in their accomplishments when they succeed, even if it's in small ways. Finding a balance between organized activities and unstructured play ensures children grow in confidence as well as in their approach to education (StMartins, 2025). Piaget's constructivist theory, which says that children actively build their own knowledge through investigation and firsthand experience with their surroundings. This approach is in line with the Reggio Emilia and Montessori approaches, which value children as capable, independent learners who direct their own education (myteachingcupboard, 2023).

How can adults support self-directed play?

Adults can act as 'learning allies' and create an atmosphere that promotes independence, curiosity, and focused attention can effectively support self-directed play. This involves creating a flexible, physically and emotionally secure environment, offering unrestricted materials, and letting kids spend extended periods of time exploring their own ideas without any outside influence (learningjournals, 2026). An adult can gently structure and keep play together for a child or group of children by participating in the activity themselves. Children's play can be creatively and physically active and fast-paced. By assigning a specific role, acting as a partner, setting an example of appropriate behavior, or giving a child a method to end play when they're ready, an adult can encourage engagement (Pentagon, 2022). By acting as guides who value, support, and have confidence in children to direct their own play, adults help children develop self-assurance, independence, and motivation. This method encourages children to take chances, develop critical thinking skills, and create a good self-image by supporting their ideas, observing rather than interrupting, and creating a safe, child-led atmosphere (Pentagon, 2022).

Why is self directed play important? freedom choice, more interest

Children's development greatly benefits from self-directed play because it gives them the freedom to select their own activities and materials, which increases their own motivation and level of engagement with what they are doing. This also develops essential skills like creativity, problem-solving, and emotional control (Unicef, 2019). Following their own interests and hobbies is the most meaningful approach for children to build their knowledge and skills. Play gives children the time and space to experiment with and improve their ideas and thoughts while also creating connections in their learning. Effective practitioners take on the role of coaches rather than teachers, demonstrating, expanding, and challenging children's learning through well-timed interactions and interventions (Cambridge, 2016).

In depth discussion and understanding of an observation method for young children. Choose from the following observation types (750 words).

Observation types-

Scale based observations-

-schedule of growing skills

-Strengths and difficulties

-questionnaires

leuven scale individual child observations-

-Movement trackers

-interaction tracker

-running record

What is observation?

To be able to understand children's growth, interests, and learning methods, it is essential to observe, listen to, and record their play, behaviors, and interactions (connectchildcare, 2024). Observation in early childhood education involves carefully observing, hearing, and recording children's interactions, language, and behavior throughout routines and play. By using this technique to inform assessments of developmental milestones, strengths, and needs, educators can create learning experiences that are age-appropriate, responsive, and customized to promote progress (Birthto5matters, nd). Practitioners can develop a real, accurate picture of each child as an individual through observation and assessment, which provides a starting point for organizing suitable learning opportunities and support. In this approach, children's self-initiated activities are observed, their growth is recognized, and future steps to direct their learning are identified (Birthto5matters, nd). Observations help nursery managers and owners understand the effectiveness of the curriculum. They also show how well children are doing in the nursery. They help nursery managers make informed choices to improve the learning environment and better support each child's unique needs (connectchildcare, 2024).

Explain the chosen method

Narrative Observations/Running Record

Writing a thorough, descriptive report on a child's actions during a certain activity or over a set period of time is known as a running record. This approach clearly shows the child's behavior, relationships, and learning processes while capturing the order of events. A child's interests, opinions, and progress can all

be explained through the use of narrative observations. Parents can be given a better knowledge of their child's learning by using this strategy (connectchildcare, 2024).

Benefits and limitations of chosen observations

Providing a continuous description of what happened during an observation as they happen in real time is known as a running record. It includes everything that happens inside a specific time period rather than just one specific event. Instead of concentrating on a single child's behavior, it looks at the behaviors of all the children. Parentingspecialneeds, (2026) suggests that to be able to help the observer better understand the actions that occurred but also the context in which they occurred, a narrative observation involves systematically capturing details. When you speak with the teacher following the observation, you may use this as proof to back up your arguments and offer recommendations. It is possible to discuss useful strategies or techniques that can be used as part of a behavior intervention plan and increase a child's attention, time on task, and overall learning in the classroom by using accurately written notes in order of occurrence from a narrative observation along with specific examples about the student's behavior (parentingspecialneeds, 2026).

Does it give a holistic view of the child or does it only focus on one area? What are the strengths and limitations of this?

Narrative observations need a lot of time to complete and are very thorough. They are typically extremely descriptive and are written as the activity or event is taking place.

Writing a running record in the present tense involves accurately capturing the child's actions and words. They are written while you are present and taking in the scene, which can distract attention from other children and getting involved in the play and activities going on.

However, because the child's voice and precise movements are essential in these situations, they are especially helpful when you wish to concentrate on language development or have concerns about a child's safety (theempowerededucator, 2025).

Demonstrate an understanding of the role of play when understanding observations and assessment of children and consider how this affects the child's engagement and the accuracy of the observation (750 words).

When observing and assessing children, why is play important?

Play is considered as an important part of child development and an essential tool for early childhood observation and evaluation as it offers a relaxed, natural setting in which children can express their real needs, interests, and abilities. Without the stress of formal, strict testing, this "child-led" approach enables teachers to learn more about a child's development (arkstart, 2025). Children are strong learners. With the correct support, every child can advance in their education. A variety of strategies are used in effective pedagogy. Children pick up knowledge through play, adult modeling, peer observation, guided learning, and direct instruction. To be able to encourage high-quality play, practitioners carefully lay out the necessary spaces. They occasionally give children the time and space they need to create their own games. They occasionally join in to extend and gently encourage the learning of the children. Early childhood educators can help children learn through group projects as well ([Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk), 2023). There is a lot of information to support the cognitive development of children through play. Knowledge of a language, problem-solving abilities, developing visual skills, memory, and creativity are all included in this. While children's play activities might seem pointless to many adults, they are crucial for the child's development

of focus and attention. Children's focus and self-discipline can also be improved by playing in outdoor settings with natural elements (playscotland, 2026).

Does observing children in play give us a more accurate reflection of where they are in their development? How do we know this?

Quality observations provide practitioners with important information about the child, so it's important to slow down and pay attention to the children in the setting. Children sense the impatience and general attitude toward observing them, and they know on a deep level that if practitioners treat the observation as a tickbox, then they are not being honest and enthusiastic, and they will act accordingly. By treating each child with respect and acknowledging their individuality, a deeper understanding of them is recognised (thevoiceoftheearlychild, 2025). Over time, observation develops an invaluable holistic view of the child. Play observations can reveal the child's actual voice in play. All children are supervised and given the chance to see the child in various environments on their own, with friends, and with family in the wider community. Children can communicate their ideas, feelings, and thoughts through play as they feel comfortable. Children will naturally react to their surroundings and peers during the session, but play is still the most real way for them to express themselves in any situation, making it an invaluable activity for adults to watch. By using the voice of the actual child, they can be 'better supported, scaffold, repeat, or enhance their learning experience' (thevoiceoftheearlychild, 2025).

How can adults support this?

By acting as "participant observers" during play, observing, documenting, and evaluating behaviours without interfering adults can ensure proper developmental assessment. Rather than depending on planned, adult-led activities, adults can obtain a comprehensive, accurate picture of a child's cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development by recording, reflecting aloud, structuring, and appreciating child-led, unplanned play (birthto5matters, nd). When trying to find out how best to support children's ideas, interests, and goals, adults pay attention to their play, interactions, and thought processes. In a playful, creative relationship, sensitive interactions include listening, directing, explaining, asking appropriate questions, and assisting children in reflecting on what they have learned. Being sensitive to children and knowing what they can accomplish with help as well as what they know and are capable of doing on their own without adult guidance is largely dependent on the OAP process (observation, assessment and planning). Children's understanding appears when they use the knowledge and abilities they learned in a variety of ways throughout their independent play and activities (Birthto5matters, nd).

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