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). The ability of a child to pick up knowledge, share thoughts, and take on roles during play will determine how well they can play nicely. Children under the age of four are usually not ready to respect other children's property, share toys, or understand the importance 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).
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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. When children make their creations, they are continuously learning about new materials and ideas, expressing their emotions and creativity, whilst developing their fine motor skills. It provides a range of opportunities for cognitive development, such as the ability to identify colors, understand patterns and shapes, and resolve problems. Another example is games and activities in groups where children can improve their cognitive and problem-solving skills, by working on a group puzzle. Additionally, it supports children's social and emotional development by teaching them the importance of communication, teamwork, and sharing (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)

<u>What is self directed play?</u>

Children pick their own activities and areas of interest, allowing them to freely express themselves and engage in unstructured play with their surroundings. Children initiate, maintain, and develop play without adult involvement (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).

<u>How can adults support self-directed play?</u>

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).By engaging in the play themselves, an adult can help the child or group maintain play together and gently manage it. By giving a child a particular role, acting as a friend, showing proper behavior, adults can encourage engagement by giving children an option to stop playing when they're ready. (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).

<u>Why is self directed play important? freedom choice, more interest</u>

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
-questionaires

leuven scale individual child observations-
-Movement trackers
-interaction tracker
-running record

<u>What is observation?</u>

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). Nursery owners and managers can better understand the curriculum's efficacy by using observations. They demonstrate the children's progress in the nursery. They assist nursery managers in making well-informed decisions that enhance the learning environment and better meet the individual needs of each child. (connectchildcare, 2024).

<u>Explain the chosen method</u>

Narrative Observations/Running Record

A running record or narrative observation describes what a child does over a set time or during a particular activity. This method records the sequence of events while clearly displaying the child's behavior, interactions, and learning processes. Narrative observations can be used to explain a child's interests, opinions, and development. By employing this technique, parents can gain a greater understanding of their child's learning. (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, it can be used as evidence to support the points and make suggestions. By using specific written notes in the correct order from a narrative observation and examples of the child's behavior, it can be used to talk about beneficial techniques or methods that can be used into a behavior intervention plan and improve a child's focus, time spent on task, and overall classroom learning (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).

<u>When observing and assessing children, why is play important?</u>

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 develop quickly. Every child may improve in learning using the appropriate support. A wide variety of techniques are used in successful pedagogy. Children learn through play, simple instructions, adults demonstrating, peer observation, and guided learning improve their understanding.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. Sometimes they join in to help the children learn more and to gently encourage their progress. Group activities are another way that early childhood educators may support children's learning (Gov.uk, 2023). A number of studies have been conducted on the benefits of play on children's cognitive development. This includes verbal ability, problem-solving skills, the development of visual abilities, memory as well as imagination. Children's play activities might seem pointless to many adults but they are essential to a child's ability to focus and pay attention. Playing in the outdoors can also help children become more engaged (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 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 Adults observe their play, interactions, and thinking processes, as well as their ideas, interests, and objectives. Asking questions, listening, leading, educating and encouraging children to think on what they have learned helps build a playful relationship. Observation, assessment, and planning (OAP) process is an important part of being sensitive to children and knowing what they could achieve with support , as well as what they are capable of doing on their own without adult supervision. When children apply the skills and knowledge they have picked up in a variety of ways during their independent play and activities, it shows that they understand.(Birthto5matters, nd).

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