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AI cover sheet

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Section 1

The UNCRC suggests that play is any action that is started and organised by children and can occur in many different environments at any time. Play is often a challenge to define as it is unique to each individual and can have many different meanings and definitions. Play should be creative and unrestricted, offering endless opportunities for fun, discovery and learning (Waters-Davies,2022). Brown, (2013) suggests play is essential for children's holistic development and play deprivation can have a detrimental effect on children's wellbeing. Article 31 in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child also states that children have a right to play and leisure (Brown,2013).

Sensory play

Sensory play is defined as children using their senses such as taste, touch, smell and hearing to explore different resources, environments and the world around them. This type of play may involve one or many of the senses (Kaduson and Schaefer, 2021). Sensory play can include a variety of different resources such as the use of dough, food items, water, sand and paint. Sensory play can be supported in the early years as practitioners can provide engaging resources and activities that spark children's curiosity. Practitioners can incorporate edible resources such as coloured rice, spaghetti and edible paint. Practitioners can also create a sensory den with a variety of lights, colours and materials and provide opportunities for sand and water play. Practitioners must give the children choice and ensure the messy play is not structured, over complicated and adult led as this will help them to develop holistically. Practitioners in the early years can make links between the senses and make links to the curriculum by incorporating messy play into everyday maths and literacy activities (BBC Tiny Happy People, n.d.) Sensory play is an important play type as it has various benefits and is crucial to a child's holistic development. The benefits include developing social, communication and language skills, it promotes

creativity and independence whilst also supporting healthy brain development. Sensory play is beneficial for children with additional learning needs as it can have a soothing effect and provide emotional regulation (Action for children,2022) Maria Montessori supports sensory play and believes in a child led and child centred approach. The Montessori approach encourages sensory activities and play that includes real life experiences using resources such as water or food items (Care Learning, 2025)

Constructive play

Constructive play is when children use resources such as blocks and bricks to construct something. Constructive play has many benefits to support holistic development as it supports spatial awareness, creativity, independence and architectural skills. Constructive play also supports brain development by encouraging critical thinking, mathematical skills and problem solving. Practitioners can support constructive play in practice by providing children with various open-ended materials and giving children opportunities to build and manipulate the materials (Akdemir and Sevimli-Celik, 2024) Piaget suggests that children learn by experimenting and linking their thoughts to the real world. He believed children enjoyed seeing how things fit together like a jigsaw. Piaget suggests that before children begin constructive play, they will have completed the stage of functional play that prepares them for constructive play. During functional play they will have explored resources and materials understanding their shapes and sizes in readiness for constructive play (Arnerich,2021).

Play type

Play type is defined as the behaviours that children display, and that adults and practitioners can observe when play is taking place. Many have tried to categorise the various types of play. The text A Playworker's Taxonomy of Play Types by Bob Hughes is often referred to when discussing play types. It is crucial for practitioners to acknowledge the different types of play so that they can appreciate the

importance and benefits of the various play types and observe the children's play accurately. This will allow practitioners to encourage and support them appropriately (Play Scotland,2023). Play types cover physical play, social play, sensory play, constructive play, imaginative play, exploratory play and symbolic play. Each play type of supports various aspects of children's development that allows children to develop holistically. Practitioners must ensure they are providing opportunities for different play types to meet children's needs. For example, physical play supports a child's physical development, strength and gross motor skills whist social play and imaginative play encourage language skills and social development (Care learning, 2025).

Stages of play

Play plays a key role in children's holistic development as children play in a variety of different ways, this has been identified as six stages of play. Children may favour one play type or mix and match between many (BBC Tiny Hapy People nd). The play types include unoccupied play, which is seen as the start of play where babies move and use their senses to discover and explore. The next stage is solitary play, where children will play alone with toys or books and do not communicate or socialise with other children. Younger children may be at this stage of play as they lack the communication to play and socialise with others. Children with additional learning needs or quieter, shy children often display this play type. Additionally, there is spectator play where children watch others but do not join in. The next stage is parallel play which means that children will play next to one another with little interaction. This links to spectator play as children often quickly move from one stage to another. There is also associative play where children begin to interact and communicate. This staged will usually be reached when a child develops the appropriate language skills. Lastly, there is cooperative play where children begin to work together, during this stage of play they may play games and follow rules. This stage of play involves a lot of social interaction (BBC Tiny Happy People). However, to contrast this, Piaget suggests that there are 4 types of play that occur throughout children's development. The stages include functional play that includes physical actions such as running and jumping. There is constructive play that involves

children playing to achieve or build something. Additionally, there is fantasy play where children can role play and pretend. Lastly, there are games that involve structure or rules. In this stage children learn about rules and consequences (Gallo,2021).

Section 2

Self-directed play

Waters-Davies (2022) suggests that self – directed play is when children have control and choice regarding their play. This means they also get to make decisions. Waters-Davies (2022) believes that practitioners can support self- directed play by not interfering or initiating a child's play and letting the child have complete control. They also suggest that practitioners can educate themselves and gain a deeper understanding of children's play so that they can support children effectively and provide a rich play environment. Waters-Davies (2022) suggests that the role of the adult is to be attentive and make careful observations during play and gain an insight to the child as this will help practitioners to plan future resources and play opportunities that the children find engaging. Adults can also support self-directed play by encouraging children to ask questions and be inquisitive about their play, this will further develop their critical thinking skills and imagination and extend children's play. Self –directed play can be supported through practitioners providing a range of open-ended resources and an adequate amount of time to play and explore the resources and their environment (Mclaren, 2023). However, there can be challenges for adults when supporting self-play. For example, parents and practitioners may feel worried about giving children complete control over their play due to potential accidents or fears about their safety. Adults may also struggle to take a step back to observe and support children's play rather than directing it. Adults can often struggle to allow children to take appropriate risks, however it is important for children to experience and take risks during play to further develop their resilience and problem-solving skills (Mclaren,2023).

Self-play is important as according to Wasik and Jacobi-Vessels (2017) it is essential for children to develop holistically as it supports and promotes children's creativity and improves children's ability to self-regulate. Additionally, Wasik and Jacobi-Vessels also suggests that self-play is important as it helps to develop children's language and communication skills.

In addition to this, The Welsh government also demonstrates the importance of play for children and the importance of children being able to choose their own play. The Welsh Government continue to fight for children's rights as they believe that play plays a crucial part in children's development, so they created the world's first policy for play in 2002 which is centred around the UNCRC (Play Wales,n.d)

Section 3

Observation in the early years is the process of observing children as they engage in play which supports practitioners to gain more information about the children in their care so that they can support them to develop holistically and provide an enabling, rich play environment (Brodie, 2017). There are many different types of observation, and the chosen observation method will depend on the environment, the child and what kind of information you want to learn about the child. These types can include magic moments which is a quick observation method commonly conducted by writing small pieces of information such as a child's first, something out of the ordinary or something they've completed well on a sticky note. Another method of observation is a time sample where a practitioner will record the areas a child accesses in the setting and how long they are there. Both methods are useful to gain information and a deeper understanding of the child such as their behaviours and interests (Brodie,2017).

Barber and Paul-Smith (2012) suggest that observation in the early years is important as the outcome of an observation supports practitioners to plan activities and resources that will support the needs of the children. Barber and Paul-Smith (2012) also state that observations are important as they are the beginning of a healthy attachment between a child and their key person. This supports children's

holistic development as children will feel safe and content within the setting. Observations are important to track children's progress and development and determine if there are behaviour related issues or extra support that needs to be given. Observations are also beneficial when communicating with parents and carers to share information and work in partnership to support the child (Barber and Paul-Smith, 2012).

The Schedule of Growing Skills (SOGS) method of observation will be explored in this assignment. The Schedule of Growing skills is an observation tool used from birth to 5 years and is used to assess areas such as cognitive development, hearing, speech and language, social skills, self-care skills, visual, manipulative and locomotor skills. The child will be given a score of age in months in each of these areas. To complete a SOGS observation the child will be given a variety of tasks, and the practitioner will fill in a score sheet (NHS,2022).

The schedule of growing skills has many benefits as this method of observation uses toys such as bricks, blocks and dolls so that the child associates the activities within the assessment as play. This will support the child's overall wellbeing and encourage the child to feel more secure and relaxed. Another benefit of the schedule of growing skills is that it is simple and can be done on the spot in a setting. The simple system benefits both the child and practitioner as it discovers the areas of development where a child will need extra support. This observation method is also beneficial as it covers all areas of development. Additionally, it is beneficial as it can give results in 30 minutes which supports a busy practitioner and allows more time to assess other children. (WJEC,2019) However, there are limitations such as the age bands of the observation as in the first year of life there is a two-month screening, however as the child gets older, they increase to 6 months and then 12 months when the child reaches 36 months. This is seen as a limitation as it cannot accurately track children's development. Another limitation of this observation method is that it is not sensitive enough as children need to be two months below their age on the assessment to be picked up as having a delay. This will mean that many children's needs will not be met as they will not be seen as needing extra support (Williams et al.,2013).

The schedule of growing skills gives a holistic view of the child as it assesses each area of development.

Section 4

Edwards and Bird (2017) suggest that play is important when observing and assessing as it gives practitioners a chance to get to know the children and gain a good understanding of the children's overall development. Play is important when observing children as it allows practitioners to see how effective the provision is and how the children act in different areas, environments and how they complete an activity. Through play practitioners can observe children's physical, social, emotional and language development and monitor their progress. Observing children during play can support practitioners planning as it allows practitioners to discover children's interests and gain an insight to the resources and activities they find engaging. This will further develop their learning and engagement (Kelly,2016). Observation during play is crucial as it allows practitioners to discover which children require extra support or intervention and they can share this information with parents or carers (Care Learning,2025)

However, observation during play does not always give an accurate reflection of where children are in their development as practitioners are aware of the Hawthorne effect which means that the children being observed can often act differently if they are aware that they are being observed (Williams,2018) Other factors that may lead to an inaccurate reflection of where children are in their development are the expectations of the practitioner that is observing as they may record what they wish to see or they may give prompts to the children to achieve the desired outcome. Additionally, there may also be bias when recording observations. For example, practitioners may have a preconceived idea of the child they are observing or observe the child on a day they are displaying unfavourable behaviour (Williams,2018).

Learning and developing through play is part of The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework that suggests the three stages in which adults can support play. Adults

can support play and observation with appropriate planning by giving children a variety of choice, providing a rich play environment and allowing children to challenge themselves, this will support holistic development as it encourages children's independence and confidence (Rymanowicz, 2015). In the next stage adults can support observation during play by standing back and being present and supporting the children instead of leading or controlling the play. This will improve children's wellbeing as they will feel as though they have a choice. Practitioners can support the children's play and observe by talking to them about their play, asking questions and extending their learning. Lastly, adults support play and observation by reviewing children's play and listening to them to better understand their play experiences (Rymanowicz, 2015).

Howard and McInnes (2017) found that play is important while undertaking observations as when looking at children's perception of an activity as play instead of not play that children's emotional well-being accelerated when they engaged in activities they thought of as play. They found that the children that perceived the activity as play were more occupied and immersed than the other children who used the same resources but did not regard their activity as play. They also found the children taking part in the activity they considered play seemed happier. In contrast to this, the children that took part in an activity they saw as work or adult led were not as focused and struggled to pay attention to the task. According to Howard and McInnes (2017) the children spoke negatively about the task and showed limited movement. These findings support the importance of the role of play during observation and the idea that children viewing an activity as play benefits their holistic development as they are more confident and can take risks without worrying that they may not get something right as a practitioner is observing them. It is also linked to higher levels of wellbeing and increased self-esteem.

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