

Module: ECGE4003

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Components:

Section1 (1086 words)

Section 2 (851 words)

Section 3 (492 words)

Section 4 (533 words)

## AI Cover Sheet

I have acknowledged the use of Google Scholar to research material for my studies.

Prompt 1: Piaget Theory of play

Prompt 2: Vygotsky Theory of play

Prompt 3: Adults role in self-directed play

Prompt 4: Perceptions of play with adults

Prompt 5: Leuven Scale

Prompt 6: Ferre Laevers

## **Section 1**

Play is a complicated concept to define and can be interpreted in various ways because there are a range of perspectives and beliefs about what play is and the impact play has for children (Waters-Davies, 2022, p.4). Waters-Davies (2022) also emphasizes the collective contributions of key pioneers in child development including Piaget, Vygotsky and Froebel and although they have different perspectives about child development and learning processes, all these theorists have influenced and shaped play within our early years practice today. This is due to a shared belief in the power of play in children's development and understanding of the world around them. According to Gordon (2009) play is complex and suggests that as practitioners it is important to adapt a mindset about play which is versatile just as play itself is versatile. This is because having a versatile approach can boost creativity, enhance collaboration with children and fosters learning and growth through trial and error. This idea is also shared by Smith (1997) as cited by Canning (2011) who also highlights that play is difficult to capture and define due to its diverse nature. McInnes *et al* (2013) points out it would be more beneficial to move away from defining play and approaching play from a child's perspective. Furthermore, Play, Learn, Thrive (n.d) state play is the work of the child this is a phrase associated to both Piaget and Montessori and reiterates the importance of play in cognitive, social, physical and emotional development of children.

Therefore, it can be said that play is multifactored, interconnected and fundamental for holistic development and learning. According to Play, Learn, Thrive (n.d.), Piaget identified four key types of play stages that occurred between the ages of nought to eleven and believed how a child engaged in play would indicate the area of cognitive development that child was at. However, according to McArdle (2024) Vygotsky built on Piaget's idea but viewed cognitive development as a continuous process rather than as fixed stages and believed that children could gain information from more knowledgeable partners and introduced the concept of a zone of proximal development (ZPD). This is the gap between what children can independently achieve and how they can reach their full potential with guidance and support, placing significant importance on the role of social interactions in learning. This is an

idea also shared by Froebel who according to Tovey (2020) says that adults need to offer “freedom with guidance” to children and ensure practitioners are providing quality play opportunities and experiences. Treasure (2018) highlights another theorist work Midred Parten in understanding social interactions between children in play and placed play into six categories unoccupied play, solitary play, onlooker play, parallel play, associative play and co-operative play these categories of play can help to support us to understand children’s developmental areas of play alongside the emerging play types.

It could be said that theorists’ theory about play stages, and the progression of play offers insight to inclusivity and inclusion for children with additional learning needs adopting a view that play can indicate cognitive abilities and therefore give information to adults on how best to support play stages and types supporting holistic development of children.

There are different types of play that support different aspects of a child’s development from physical play, exploratory play, creative play and social play. As early years practitioners providing environments that offer a wide variety of opportunities and experiences for children to engage in all types of play to support children’s holistic development.

**Physical Play** – This type of play in the context of outdoor play is where children engage in being outside in natural or open environments. Outdoor play is essential for the holistic development of children as it provides opportunities for open ended play and develops physical, social emotional and cognitive areas. Play Wales (2025) link outdoor play with many health and wellbeing benefits from increased mental health, decreased stress and depression and highlight its value to providing better lifelong outcomes for children. Boulton and Thomas (2023) capture Froebel’s passion for using outdoor play as a learning resource for children as it offers authentic experiences that form connections with nature. Similarly, Tovey (2017) emphasizes the Froebelian approach to outdoor play and the idea of Froebelian gardens for children to play and explore to aid development and understanding of the world in a meaningful way. She points out that outdoor play provides sensory rich, hands-on experiences with natural opportunities to be curious and take risks. Furthermore, The Department of Education (2020) reinforces physical play as

essential to holistic development as it also encompasses fine motor skills promoting the foundations for early literacy by developing hand-eye co-ordination as well as skills to support writing.

**Exploratory Play-** This type of play in the context sensory exploration offers children opportunities to explore their world through the senses. Brightwheel (2023) state that sensory exploration is vital for child development in stimulating their five senses through exploration to develop tactile skills. It also promotes well-being and supports self-regulation due to the calming element these activities offer (Sheldon, 2023). The Curiosity Approach (2024) highlight the range of multisensory benefits that sand creates for children from fine motor skills, imagination, problem solving and regulation. Gross (2012) emphasizes the sensory and learning benefits of water play for children for basic mathematical and scientific concepts through experiments, observations and the hands-on experience it offers. Additionally, Heineman (2022) highlights The Reggio Emilia approach and the belief that children have one hundred languages/ways that they use to express themselves. This suggests that a sensory rich environment for children to explore is key for expressing those one thousand languages. With that in mind Montessori Academy (2023) point out the significance of sensory play in helping children to reconnect with the environment and world around them especially as modern day lives primarily based around screens and technology. It places sensory play as the foundations of meaningful learning due to its multifaceted nature of cognitive development. Likewise, Taylor (2019) says that children who have interception or proprioception difficulties or “imbalances” can achieve balance by being provided opportunities to stimulate their senses.

Welsh Government (2020) highlight four purposes that reinforce essential skills that can be developed within a range of learning experiences. It stipulates the importance of cross curricular experiences developing skills over different contexts and help to encourage capable learners, that are creative, ethically informed that are healthy and confident. Early years practitioners can support these purposes and outcomes for learners by ensuring they provide a variety of play types.

## **Section 2**

Welsh Assembly Government (2002) state that self-directed play is play that is freely chosen by children where they are allowed to explore, be curious and has no end

goal in mind. Furthermore, Ledendecker (2020) views self-directed play as open ended and the advantages are wide-ranging as it encourages independence, builds confidence and allows paced learning.

Play Sufficiency Wales (2024) placed requirements on adults working with children to advocate and make changes to support children's right to play. The United Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1992) Article 31 recognised the importance of play for children's development and wellbeing and made it a right for children to be able to play and engage in recreational activities. Welsh Government (2022) published the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings that highlighted the role of practitioners as enabling adults who can support children's play by creating enriching, engaging environments to ignite a spark in children to want to explore and be curious. Further to this Welsh government (2023) released a quality framework that emphasized that adults working with children need to develop children's curiosity, sense of belonging and support them to feel safe through opportunities to play and explore and the interactions and relationships adults build with children.

A key element in supporting self-directed play for children is the adults having a clear understanding of their role within the Play Cycle. King and Sturrock (2019) highlight six elements of the play cycle from the Metalude which is the initial play drive, the play cues, the play return, play frames and annihilation or natural ending of play. They emphasize that during this play process the role of the adult is not to direct or change the child's play but to understand where the child is on the play cycle, read play cues to provide the intervention children need at that time. This could be by simply providing a resource to extend learning for the child or being invited into play by the child, however they stress that play needs to be kept meaningful for the child and that adults avoid changing or directing the play a process known as adulteration. Else (2014) also stipulates the importance of adults having a good understanding of child development and in particular the play cycle to appropriately read children's play cues to ensure that the play return responses support the extension of play either by the interactions with adults or through adapting the environment, to scaffold learning and growth. Howard and McInnes (2012) emphasize that children's emotional well-being is higher when they perceive an activity as play than when it is perceived as not play. Marbina *et al* (2015) stipulates that positive wellbeing in

children will allow them to engage in their environment and immerse themselves in meaningful play and learning opportunities. This highlights the value of self-directed play for boosting well-being for children enhancing physical and mental health for positive outcomes for lifelong learning. However, McInnes *et al* (2013) highlight that many practitioners do not value child led play and tend to create work-based tasks with an emphasis on managing and directing rather than being led by the children in play suggesting more needs to be done to upskill practitioners understanding of the importance of child led play and their role in supporting children's play to enhance its full potential for children's development. Birth to five Matters (2021) highlight that adults play a key role in children's learning and development through observing children and knowing when to intervene with guidance and when to stand back and allow children to practice what they already know, problem solve and consolidate skills supporting holistic development. The idea of adults knowing when they need to guide or support children's play can be seen in Vygotsky's concept of scaffolding. Bates (2019) illustrates Vygotsky's concept and the role of practitioners to scaffold learning through support and guidance in the zone of proximal development. This will enable children to gain a deeper understanding and knowledge that children cannot achieve by themselves while still fostering independence and confidence. McLean *et al* (2023) state that perceptions of play based learning and uncertainty about when children need guidance varies and often while practitioners support child led learning pressures from statutory requirements often get prioritised. Bottrill (2018) states this often results in inflicting specific learning outcomes for all children and limits self-directed play opportunities that value the unique child and their needs. Also, health and safety expectations can place restrictions on risky play opportunities that is crucial for building resilience and confidence. Heineman (2022) suggests that adults should be partners in children's learning and should observe and listen to children in play as a method of research to providing relevant opportunities and effective environments to facilitate a continuous cycle of learning. Play Wales (2022) emphasize the adult role is to act as a resource in facilitating self-directed play by providing a variety of experiences that foster independence and exploration that is accessible. They can do this by using their up-to-date knowledge of play processes and reflective practice to respond to children to expand play improving development and wellbeing.

### **Section 3**

Stella Louis (2022) emphasizes that observation is a process whereby practitioners watch and listen to children to gain insights into what engages, interests and motivates them within play and by reflecting on these practitioners can use the information to help support and extend their play. Welsh Government (2023) says that observations should capture a range of developmental areas supporting holistic growth and highlight children's strengths, where they need to go next and how practitioners can support them to get there. Observations usually involve specific criteria in relation to what is being assessed. There are a range of observation methods to gather information about children in a formal or informal way. Informal methods such as narrative observations gather information about how a child engages and interacts with their environment and resources. Photographs and video observations capture in the moment events. All these methods tend to gather information about children's likes and dislikes, preferred areas of play and relationships between peers. Additionally, there are more structured and formal methods of gathering information such as Schedule of Growth (SOGS) that gather information on child development in a range of areas or rating scales that have a set criterion such as well-being.

For this assignment, I am going to talk about Leuven Scale. MacRae and Jones (2020) highlight Leuven Scale to measure how involved a child is in the self-directed play using a nought to five scale. Nought being the least involved and five being denoting and the most involved and by doing this we can gauge quality provision. Laevers (2006) states that the measuring of academic success and outcomes takes away from the holistic views of children and instead practitioners need to focus on using method that capture a range of other elements from physical, social, communication and creativity to give better understanding of development for children and by bringing children into the highest level of involvement this is where the deeper level of learning happens. Learning Journals (n.d) state an advantage of using Leuven Scales in the early years is that it is child centred and based on observations. They also highlight the importance of Leuven Scale in encouraging practitioners to be flexible and reflective ready to meet children's needs. Arnerich

(2021) also emphasizes Leuven scale being used as part of reflective practice as it lends to a deeper level of understanding of child development. However, as with any form of observational methods the Leuven scales have some disadvantages. The type of observation needed to gather quality information on children's wellbeing is time consuming and again observations of engagement and involvement rely on perception and bias and therefore requires training of staff to all be using Leuven Scale consistently in the same way. Learning Journals (n.d) also highlights a major downfall to the Leuven scale is that it does not take into consideration additional learning needs and children who perhaps do not engage in a typical way with the adults peers or the environment.

#### **Section 4**

Chilvers (2019) states that observing children while they are engaged in play offers rich information on the way they are developing learning and thinking and helps to make more informed decisions on how to extend opportunities to enhance further learning. It is a way to gain developmental insights over a range of skills giving a comprehensive view of the overall child to better support growth. Welsh Government (2022) recognises the role of observations in the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings. It encourages practitioners to actively observe children throughout the day in all areas of provision to ensure they capture a range of skills and knowledge a child has over different contexts. This emphasizes observations as a key method to help inform how to extend learning and play experiences through a notice, analyse and respond cycle. Isaacs (1932) as cited in Chilvers (2018) highlights the importance of watching, listening and being patient with children to be able to understand them. She was a key influence in the role of observations in children's play as she believes it focused on holistic learning and conveyed developmental needs. Additionally, Encarnacao *et al* (2018) recognises the importance of being able to observe play to inform children's play type and developmental stage of play as well as gathering preferences and highlight areas of weaknesses. This information can then support adults to guide further progression and development. However, Encarnacao *et al* (2018) also highlights that observation can often be biased, relies on individual interpretation and perceptions of play and children. This suggests that observations can lead to inaccurate recording of information based on perceptions, lack of knowledge and understanding and in turn

would limit informed decision making and create poor planning. Chilvers (2018) emphasizes the importance of practitioners having extensive knowledge and understanding of child development and learning processes to equip them with the observational skills needed to use critical thinking to dig deeper when observing children. Often when children know they are being observed they change their behaviour and play to fit adult expectations. McInnes *et al* (2013) recognises the importance of child perceptions of play and the impact this has on learning. They highlight the difference in children who experience adults in partnership play as more likely to be more playful as they do not make distinction between play and not play. This suggests formal observation methods limit natural play and impact how children perceive activities that involve adults as not play. This emphasizes the importance of fostering natural environment for children where adults become play partners. Bredikyte (2022) agrees that the adult's role in children's play is that of play partners and play guides and in adopting these roles adults will create effective environments that promote exploration and independence. The idea of becoming play partners suggest adults will be able to observe meaningful and authentic play alongside children gaining more insight to children's understanding and skills. Stella Louis (2022) stipulates Froebel's belief in the role of observation to observe growth and development in children and a way of understanding what children are not able to tell us. She also stresses the importance of observations to get to know children and find out what they can do.

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