

Cover Sheet

For this assessment I have submitted the following:

Section 1- Evidence of a clear understanding of the importance of a variety of play types. The significance of holistic play should also be considered.

Section 2 - 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.

Section 3 - In depth discussion and understanding of an observation method for young children.

Section 4 - Demonstrate an understanding of the role of play when undertaking observations and assessments of children and consider how this affects the child's engagement and the accuracy of the observation.

I have not used AI in my work.

Section 1 – Evidence of a clear understanding of the importance of a variety of play types. The significance of holistic play should also be considered.

Art and craft enables children to experiment with their own thoughts and ideas. Natural materials, such as clay, and also paint or junk modelling, allow children to communicate through creative expression. This is particularly useful for children with English as an additional language as this may be the beginning of their communication (Department for Education, 2022).

Friedrich Froebel, a German based educator, is known for his ideas of early childhood education. He shared the value of creativity in play, with the use of natural materials to develop real life skills. Froebel viewed an activity, such as sewing, as a slow learning process. It requires time and patience with an attention to detail. Children are able to express themselves through sewing but are also learning sustainability by reusing fabrics and mending ripped items of clothing. Froebel sees the role of the practitioner as 'being with' the child as they engage in the experience and provide freedom with guidance to support creative learning (Green and Clark, 2024). The practitioner should consider the final product is not the goal but the learning through trial, error and process.

The process of art can take time, particularly when learning new skills. It is the role of the practitioner to allow the child freedom to choose their materials and make their own choices of how their creations should develop. It requires the child being given the time and space to work, which could mean providing time for the child to revisit their work (Westmorland and Furness, n.d). It can be challenging for the practitioner to provide enough time for the child to fully invest in their art when running on routine in a busy setting. Providing time for the child to revisit their work could avoid frustration and disappointment from the child, allowing them to continue their learning in a time scale that works for them.

Risky Play enables children to explore the environment in ways that are unpredictable and experimental. Children are able to discover height and weight, within different conditions such as, rain and wind. Risky play can also include access to risky elements, like fire, and are able to use tools within their learning. Taking risks provides a holistic approach to learning. It is seen as an important part of play as

children learn to balance and co-ordinate. They are also developing their fine and gross motor skills (Bowden, Jones, Tonge, 2025). Children can feel a great sense of achievement when they reach a goal, for instance, balancing on a high apparatus independently where they may have needed aid in the past.

Outdoor learning is a way for children to take part in risky play, with the freedom to explore nature. This can include building dens using hammers, climbing trees or lighting fires to cook on. Within the Welsh Curriculum the four strands encourage healthy learners. It states, evidence shows the impact learning in the outdoors can have, improving mental health. It believes outdoors is not just for sunny weather, it is for all weathers with opportunities to not only learn physically but for math and literacy (Edwards, 2022). Welsh Government have gone on to support these ideas by providing funding to local councils to improve environments for outdoor play. Councils were funded a share of 2 million from a Community Focused School Grant to create forest schools within their schools (Bridgend County Borough Council, 2023).

Risky play can be a challenge for the practitioner due to concerns of injury. A Guide to Forest Schools in Wales (2015) takes injury into consideration, stating that the safety of the children should be priority. It believes with regular visits to forest schools, children will learn of the risks and eventually be able to risk assess for themselves. By having high staff to child ratios and small groups, children can be supported in their risky play and given help if required (Natural Resource Wales, 2015). It can be considered, however, that accidents cannot always be avoided. It can be a daunting task having to phone a parent to let them know their child is injured for fear of being disapproved of and shouted at. It can lead to the practitioner removing risk to avoid such situations (McGee, 2024). Due to these reasons, art and craft may be a more preferred activity to manage as it requires an, arguably, less risky process. For example, a top covered in paint may be easier to explain than a cut that requires stitches or a broken arm.

Art and craft and risky play both take a holistic approach to learning. They support Froebel's idea of learning in nature and require the practitioner to be an encouraging adult within the activities. They enable children to learn about the world around them, using creativity and risk to discover how the world works. It also encourages

the child to question and learn from real life experience. The practitioner is able to support this by providing 'freedom with guidance' . With the help of observation to plan for children's needs, the practitioner is able to prepare the space and materials required (Froebel Trust, 2022). Although there are challenges, such as those mentioned, it can be seen how creativity and risk can help to enhance a child's development.

Reference List – Section One

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Section 2- 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.

Self-directed play or freely chosen-play means the child themselves make their own decisions of what and how they play, using their own ideas and interests. It can however, only be self-directed, if the adult allows the child to engage freely without negative interference (Waters-Davies, 2022).

When engaged in self-directed play, children are learning holistically. From focused play, the right side of a child's brain sets off positive chemicals encouraging the child to repeat their actions and continue to learn. This is described as a 'flow state'. When in 'flow state' the child's play can be fast moving and unpredictable. It will also be different for each child. For a teaching environment which is run on tick boxes, it can be hard to evaluate and measure learning (Janet Moyles, 2015).

Montessori valued self-directed play to develop independent learners. She believed that an environment built to support children's developmental needs, enabled children to take their play in their own direction. She felt this would support intellectual development, as well as physical development and concentration. (Montessori Education UK, n.d).

Ledendecker (2020) discusses the provision of toys and role of the adult during play. Toys are built for purpose, for instance, a child will play with a doll as a baby, but the doll is always seen as a doll. When offered a variety of materials, such as a boxes, it opens imagination for the box to become a rocket, a boat or tunnel. The possibilities can be endless. It is natural for the adult to have their own ideas of how play should develop, wanting to correct the child and step in to help. However, the childcare practitioner should stand back, observe and allow the child to be in charge of their own play. By observing and not interfering, the practitioner can watch the process from the child's perspective with ideas the adult may have never considered. From this, It can be seen how the role of the Childcare Practitioner may impact a child and their play, such as providing resources that can support imagination through play and knowing when to offer help.

Vygotsky shares the same idea of play and how resources are used, suggesting that a child makes their own rules in their play. The example is used of a stick. The child

creates the role of the stick becoming a wand which can be waved in the air and create magic. This is seen as a symbolic function. Vygotsky believes seeing the abstract in play, supports cognitive development and enables children to succeed in learning throughout their life (Smidt, 2009).

Vygotsky believed the adult has a significant role to play within the child's play. He used the term 'the zone of proximal development.' This is seen as the optimal time for learning, where the child is being challenged, but only enough, where they do not become frustrated. The role of the adult is seen to provide those challenges and also offer the support at that right moment with modelling and guidance (Dolya, 2009).

Welsh Government provide guidance to support the 'Enabling Adult' in child-led play. The guidance advises the practitioner to observe and be aware of children's developmental needs. The environment should be set up to allow expression with the enabling adult helping to build the development of new skills through provision of experiences and opportunities which meet the needs of all children (Welsh Government, 2023). The link between Welsh Government guidance and Vygotsky's ideas can be seen where the practitioner is required to observe to learn about the child, to recognise their skills and needs to be able to support within the 'zone of proximal development'.

There may be times where child-led play can be interrupted by the practitioner due to the restrictions of routine. It is considered how children do need some routine and structure in their day, such as snack time and circle time. However, if the whole day is structured, for example, phonics at 10:00am followed by maths at 10:30am, the freedom of child-led play is taken away. A child will not be ready to engage in an adult-led activity if they have been pulled away from their need to play and develop their own ideas (Bottrill, 2018). Solutions used within Newport Flying Start, have included a play policy. Within the policy it shares its values for outdoor play and commits to children having access to the outdoors as free flow throughout the session, where possible (Newport Flying Start, 2025). This enables children to carry on with their play without the interruption of a whistle to go inside. However, this can have its challenges, such as, staff ratio. In a quieter setting it may be hard to open both areas due to not having enough staff to cover both areas.

Reference list - Section Two

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Section 3 – In depth discussion and understanding of an observation method for young children. Choose from the following observation types (750 words);

Welsh Government (2023) believe observation gives the adult an insight into a child's world. From observing, a childcare practitioner is able to see what gives a child 'wow' moments and sparks curiosity. Observation from the practitioner, along with support from the parent/carer, can help build knowledge of each individual child's way of communicating and how they express themselves. The notice, analyse, respond circle, ensures that the practitioner is responsive and takes a child-led focus on play, building confidence and self-esteem. The practitioner is required to notice interests, emotions and levels of involvement. From this, Welsh Government feel the practitioner can create environments that support the need of each child.

Observation of play enables the Practitioner to develop an understanding of each individual child in a holistic way. On the first few weeks of meeting, observation can help the practitioner build a relationship with the child as they begin to build a picture of the child's interests and what they focus on within their play. This enables the practitioner to assess and plan, with a child centred approach, ensuring individual needs are met. From observing the child, the practitioner is able to see how the child plays, what they enjoy and how their play can be developed or enhanced (Birth to 5 matters, 2021).

With the development of technology throughout the years. Practitioners are now able to observe using mobile phones, tablets and digital cameras to record and take photos to document learning. Snippets of learning and conversations between groups of children can be quickly recorded, which is valued and used in many countries around the world. This includes Reggio Emilia where technology is used daily within children's learning (Smidt, 2015).

Loris Malaguzzi, the founder of Reggio Emilia preschools, saw the recording of learning as an essential part of practice. He believed that having the learning there to see, created lasting, shared memories within the setting. It enabled the adult and child to look back on achievements and also to reflect on the process (Reggio Emilia Approach, 2022). It can be seen how a sense of belonging and pride could be felt by the child when they view their pictures and work within the setting.

Within the curriculum for Wales, the digital competency framework recommends the use of technology within education settings and classes it as an important part of the 21st century. It believes children should be encouraged to use technology within their play. The adult should role model the use of items such as, cameras as it will become a transferable skill into adult life and develop knowledge of a digital world. It sees the role of the adult as an enabler to support and model the safe use of technology and encourages training for adults who may need more support (National Day Nurseries Association, n.d). Welsh government approach to technology shares that of Loris Malaguzzi, with children being involved in their own observations. By recording videos and taking pictures, the child and the adult can look back on past play and activities and discuss what happened. This takes a child-led approach into observation and planning. It could also enable the practitioner to look back in detail and holistically at past learning and take notes on parts that may have been missed if written by hand, in that moment.

It should be considered how a child may feel when being observed. If an adult were completing a task, it may affect their focus if another adult walked up beside them and began to take notes (Welsh Government, 2023). Filming from a distance, can potentially avoid the interruption of play and also enables the adult to join in with play by invitation. The practitioner could then analyse and respond on the play at another time.

Cyber Security matters within the safeguarding of children in the early years when storing the images, videos and information. The information should be stored safely following Early Years Legislation and the Data Protection Act, with access on a need to know basis. Where there is money to be made, criminals will target any size setting. Data breaches can cause damage to reputation with the families of the setting and put children at risk (Welsh Government, 2021).

It can be argued that the use of technology for recording information can put children at risk if photos and videos are leaked across the internet. BBC News recently reported about a gang of cyber criminals who stole the information, including images of around 8,000 children from a nursery chain, demanding a ransom from the company (Tidy, 2025).

As mentioned, staff should receive training on the use of technology, to support the safeguarding of children. Flying start, Newport have a Confidentiality and Information Sharing Policy to safeguard children within the settings. Parents are asked to consent to images being shared through apps such as seesaw and also for images to be taken within setting. Practitioners are required to only take photos with the camera or tablet in setting and must not use mobile phones (Newport Flying Start, 2025).

Reference List – Section Three

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Section 4 – Demonstrate an understanding of the role of play when undertaking observations and assessments of children and consider how this affects the child’s engagement and the accuracy of the observation.

As mentioned in section two, children have a need to play, with positive chemicals being released in the brain when the child is engaged in self-directed play. Howard and McInnes (2013) discuss a trial carried out on one hundred and twenty nine children who were given activities ‘like play’ and ‘not like play’. The findings showed that a lot more children showed higher emotional well-being with the ‘like play’ activity than the ‘not like play’ activity. The idea of play supporting well-being is shared by Bradshaw (2016) who states children who have access to free play in the outdoors, without structure, can become healthier and happier within themselves.

Play Wales (2020) also believe that play supports well-being, sharing that children have a natural urge to play. It states that play is enjoyable for children and keeps them active, whilst also helping to build resilience. It can help to relieve stress and anxiety and makes children feel happy. With these points considered, it can be seen how observing children through play could enable the practitioner to see a true reflection of the child if they are happy and engrossed in their natural play.

The Wellcomm assessment is a tick box screening which can be used within Early Years to discover if children may need more support with speech and language. With the use of a provided picture book, staff will then ask the child questions relating to each picture. The child will be scored red, green or amber, with those in red requiring more support (GL Support, 2017). The Wellcomm can be a useful tool to understand where a child may need support with speech. However, it can be argued that taking a child from their natural play to be asked direct questions could result in inaccurate results. Particularly for anxious children or children with additional learning needs, this process could be daunting.

By using observations, the practitioner is able to look at the child with a holistic approach. They are able to build a relationship with the child and discover their interests. This can help the practitioner to build an environment which supports the individual needs of the child. It should be considered, however, observations can have challenges such as care responsibilities. When observing the practitioner should be aware of the safety of other children. Brief observations can support both

roles without compromising safety (Care Learning, 2025). Also, a Practitioner could avoid this by making staff aware that they are observing, so not fully focused on the room.

Piaget saw observation as key to learn of a child's development and behaviours. From observing his own children he was able to learn about different areas of their development such as, their interests, their movements and how they processed their thoughts. He was also able to see their individual differences (Halpenny and Pettersen, 2013). Equilibrium is a term Piaget used to describe the process when a child makes a new discovery such as sound or smell, then places it with what they already know. When the new idea is put into question, the child will have an uncomfortable feeling, which he called Disequilibrium. At this point the child will want to change their thinking and ideas to get back to a comfortable feeling. Piaget called the mental process children go through to make new discoveries, Schemas (Pound, 2014).

Schemas is a repeated play that children do to try and make understanding of the world around them. This could include play such as, Transporting – when a child moves objects from one area to another or Enclosing – when a child builds around themselves or make fences for their toys. If practitioners are able to observe schemas within a child's play, it can help them to understand the developmental needs of an individual child and create an environment to support these discoveries (Smith, 2025).

It should be considered that Early Years staff are trained to understand schemas and what they look like when observing. Birth to five Matters (n.d) state there may be times where a child shows more than once schema. The practitioner should observe the schema being repeated regularly as the play could be a short lived interest. It can be seen how training and good knowledge can help the practitioner to understand their observations of their child in order to provide an enabling environment for each child. Childminding Uk (2020) explain that recognising a child's schema can help the practitioner to understand their emotional development as well as physical development. They will be able to build on needs whilst supporting emotions and wellbeing.

Reference List – Section Four

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