

2405866

ECEY4003

Word Count: 3,084

Student Name: Vicky Morris-Evans

Student Number: 2405866

**Module: Children's Play: Theory and Practice
(ECEY4003)**

AI Cover Sheet

**I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work.
I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes and other resources I used
before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide in
evidence.**

Section 1

Play Scotland (2025) believe play is how children engage with the world. It is the universal language of childhood, allowing them to understand one another and make sense of their surroundings. Play Scotland (2025) go on to say that through play, children observe, test, try, imitate and enjoy their environment and the people around them. When given freedom, time and space, play is what children naturally do. It is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated, with no external goal or reward. Play is fun, uncertain, challenging, flexible and non-productive, providing children with freedom, time and space to explore and learn.

There are many types of play, Play Wales (2017) suggest categorizing play types can help playworkers understand children's play behaviours, but these categories are flexible and not exhaustive. Different play types describe the range of children's play activities and how they support physical, mental and emotional development. Care Learning (2025) believes that observing and understanding children's behaviour helps practitioners support their development, identify individual needs and create an inclusive environment. Play Wales (2017) states that rough and tumble play is a type of play that includes play fighting, tumbling, tickling and body contact, but without intentional harm. They continue to say rough and tumble play helps children develop strength, agility and physical awareness.

Rough and tumble play supports holistic development, Freeman (2023) believes that children develop balance, coordination, strength and agility through play fighting, wrestling and rolling around. She continues to say that this type of play helps children understand their physical limits and capabilities, reducing injury risk. It also enhances social and nonverbal communication skills, as children learn to negotiate, cooperate and read signals from their play partners. Additionally, rough-and-tumble play aids in managing emotions and self-regulation, fostering emotional resilience. It is linked to cognitive development, with children who engage in this play showing better working memory and fewer working memory problems. However rough and tumble play comes with some negatives, Jantz (2022) claims that even with close supervision, children may still get hurt during rough and tumble play, it is just part of the activity. Parents naturally worry about their children's safety.

Commented [FS1]: You have capital L in your Reference List. Check this.

Another type of play is block play, which Glow Scotland (n.d.a) state that blocks are open-ended resources that allow children to be creative, solve problems and develop various cross-curricular concepts. This is useful as Salma (2023) says that it promotes holistic development through developing many areas of a child. Salma (2024) continues to say it enhances cognitive skills, physically, it improves fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination. Socially and emotionally, block play fosters collaboration, communication, self-expression and resilience. It also supports language development and provides a foundation for future interest in STEM fields. Block play is inclusive, accessible and encourages parental involvement, making it a timeless and invaluable tool in early childhood education.

Block play is based on Froebel's theory, Friedrich Froebel introduced simple wooden blocks, recognizing children's natural impulse for self-activity and reformation. There are 7 Stages of Block Play, and practitioners should understand these stages to identify and extend children's learning effectively.

Block play supports the holistic development of a child, Glow Scotland (n.d.b) support this by saying it offers numerous benefits for children's development. It fosters imagination, allowing children to explore their ideas in a safe context. They continue to say that it supports self-expression, enabling children to communicate their thoughts without language barriers. Problem-solving skills are enhanced as children experiment with different block configurations. Mathematics is integrated as children count, sort and compare blocks. Physical development is promoted through fine and gross motor skills, balance and spatial awareness. Creativity is encouraged through endless combinations of blocks for various purposes. Science concepts like cause and effect, balance and gravity are explored. Self-esteem is boosted through a sense of achievement. Personal and social development is supported as children build relationships and cooperate. Communication and literacy are enhanced through collaborative storytelling and discussions during block play.

Egersdorff and Mundy (2017) believe that block play links to Maslow's hierarchy of needs by saying block play supports children's development by fulfilling their basic needs, such as safety and belonging, which are essential for their overall growth and learning. They say that when children feel safe and secure during block play, they can focus on higher-level needs like creativity, problem-solving and social interactions.

Mathews (n.d.) says that Mildred Parten identified six stages of play that children go through as they develop. The 6 stages of play are unoccupied play where infants make random movements with their arms, legs, hands and feet exploring their body and surroundings. Solitary

Play: Children play alone, focusing on their own activities without interest in others. Onlooker Play: children watch other children play but do not join in. Parallel Play: Children play alongside others but do not interact with them. Associative Play: Children start to interact with others, sharing materials and ideas, however without a common goal. And lastly Cooperative Play: Children engage in organized play with others, working towards a common goal. Both block play and rough and tumble play fall into more than one stage of play.

Section 2

Ledendecker (2020a) believes that Self-directed play, also known as open-ended play, allows children to use simple toys creatively without adult-directed outcomes. Unlike toys with specific purposes, such as dolls or toy trains, open-ended materials such as cardboard tubes, balls and sticks provide endless possibilities. Ledendecker (2020a) continues to say this type of play supports children in calling the shots, encouraging them to explore and create independently. Adults should resist the urge to intervene and instead observe the magical process of children discovering their own outcomes. Play Adventures (n.d.) support this by saying self-directed play is the idea of letting children engage in play without any imposed structure or adult interference. They continue to say self-directed play is characterized by being freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. This means that children decide and control the content and intent of their play, follow their own instincts, ideas and interests engaging play for their own reasons. Play Adventures (n.d.) continue to say that this type of play allows children to explore, create and learn independently, fostering their overall development and confidence.

The Welsh Government encourages self-directed play in the early year's curriculum. In the document Welsh Government (2023a) highlights how play supports children's well-being and development and provides resources and guidance for creating play settings that encourage freely chosen, self-directed play.

Perry (2014) believe that adults should create play opportunities that address the perceived needs in children's lives, such as the need for choice, physical activity and socialization.

Welsh Government (2023b) believes that adults can support a child's development and play by creating an emotionally safe environment, model compassion and kindness and help learners manage transitions. They should observe and respond sensitively to developmental needs, encourage collaborative problem-solving and respect learners' preferences and choices. It is important that adults provide a variety of experiences, adapt plans to meet learners' needs and foster a joyful approach to learning, encouraging resilience, independence and confidence.

Rymanowicz (2015) states it is important to recognize that supporting and controlling a child's play are two different roles and only one is beneficial. When adults control, lead or take over play, they violate the principles of self-chosen and self-directed play, depriving children of meaningful experiences. Conversely, by being present and engaged without taking over, adults can support children's experiences, allowing them to learn, explore and grow independently. Rymanowicz (2015) continues to say that there are 3 key things to supporting self-directed play. Adults should provide a fun and appropriate environment that provides choice and should also engage with children, validating their efforts, adding to their play by modelling positive behaviours, preventing problems when necessary and helping them feel comfortable initiating and participating in activities. And lastly Review the play, by observing and checking in.

According to Ledendecker (2020b), there are many benefits to self-directed play. Self-directed play builds self-confidence as children realize what they can achieve on their own, creating their own games and rules. It encourages independence from a young age in a safe environment and stimulates imagination, allowing children to be creative and develop their own storylines. They go on to say it also teaches problem-solving by enabling children to make their own rules and figure out how things work. Additionally, self-directed play allows children to learn at their own pace without academic benchmarks and cultivates internal motivation as they find joy and challenge themselves independently.

Early Education (2021) claims that according to Froebel's theory children must have opportunities to make choices, for example mixing their own paints, while others may need to explore materials such as sand and water. It is important that practitioners should nurture children's ideas, feelings and development, recognizing when to give personal space and sensitive support to build confidence and skills. Practitioners should be present, creating warm environments both indoors and outdoors, observing children's interests and supporting their development positively.

Care learning (2024) says that child-led play is important as it has many benefits. It supports the holistic development of a child; it develops creativity by allowing the children space to develop their ideas of games and experiment testing ideas. Builds confidence by allowing children to

make decisions, face challenges and learn to succeed or cope with setbacks, fostering self-esteem and resilience. It enhances social skills through interactions with peers, teaching negotiation, sharing and empathy. They continue to say that child-led play also supports emotional development by providing a safe setting for children to express and work through their feelings. It promotes independence, allowing children to rely on their judgment and skills cultivating a sense of autonomy. Care learning (2024) believe this approach also teaches problem-solving as children create their own rules and figure out how to make things work which allows children to learn at their own pace without the pressure of academic benchmarks and it fosters internal motivation as they find joy and challenge themselves independently.

Section 3

According to Scottish Social Services Council (n.d.) observation is closely watching children's actions, expressions, gestures and behaviours, as well as listening to their conversations and interactions. Azilo Training (n.d.) supports this by saying observation in childcare involves watching, listening, documenting and analysing children as they explore, play and learn. They continue to say that by monitoring their physical actions, expressions, gestures and behaviours, and listening to their interactions practitioners can understand children's development, preferences and learning processes. Additionally, it provides insights into each child's individuality and how they interact with others. Azilo Training (n.d.) also say observing and listening helps to understand their developmental progress, what they like dislike and what they are learning through their play. Care Learning (2025) believe that observation is a key aspect of quality playwork. Through careful observation, playworkers can understand children's behaviours, developmental progress and social interactions, allowing them to support and facilitate children's play more effectively. Good observation skills help create inclusive, stimulating and safe environments where children can freely express themselves and thrive through play.

Moorhouse (n.d.) explains that the Leuven scales are effective tools for assessing children's well-being and engagement. Well-being measures how comfortable, spontaneous and confident pupils feel, which is essential for emotional intelligence and mental health. It influences curiosity, creativity and the ability to understand and learn. Involvement assesses whether children are fully focused, engaged and interested in activities. The tool, developed by the Research Centre for Experiential Education at Leuven University under Dr. Ferre Laevers, emphasizes two key

aspects of quality early years provision: well-being and involvement. Well-being is linked to emotional stability, self-confidence, self-esteem and resilience, while involvement is necessary for deep learning and development. Moorhouse (n.d.) continues to say that Laevers developed a 5-point scale to measure children's well-being and involvement, with higher levels indicating better development and deeper learning. The evaluation involves observing children for approximately two minutes and scoring them on the scale. Consistent low levels may threaten development, while even low levels can be learning opportunities if practitioners respond sensitively. Practitioners aim to achieve high levels of well-being and involvement, though fluctuations throughout the day are normal.

McRae and Jones (2020) states that the Leuven Scale, developed by Ferre Laevers, is widely used in early childhood education to assess children's involvement in activities believing it offers several benefits, such as helping educators evaluate the quality of learning environments by observing children's levels of involvement. They continue to say that the scale promotes a child-centred approach, focusing on children's experiences and engagement rather than just outcomes. It is also used in staff training to help practitioners better understand and respond to children's needs. Additionally, the Leuven Scale encourages parents to engage more deeply with their children's learning experiences. By providing a structured way to observe and assess involvement, educators can identify areas where improvements can be made.

McRae and Jones (2020) state however, it has some limitations. The scale relies on the observer's interpretation, introducing potential bias and variability in assessments. The recommended observation period of two minutes may not capture the full range of a child's involvement. They continue to say the scale may not account for cultural differences in children's behaviour and expressions of involvement. It heavily focuses on cognitive engagement, potentially overlooking other important aspects such as emotional and social factors. Additionally, there is a risk that the scale could be misused to justify interventions or comparisons that may not be in the best interest of the child.

According to Lewis (n.d.) The Leuven Scale supports holistic development by focusing on two critical aspects of a child's experience in their learning environment: emotional well-being and involvement. They continue to explain that emotional well-being ensures that children feel comfortable and secure, enabling them to engage in learning activities. It also helps children develop confidence and resilience, essential traits for tackling challenges, and fosters positive relationships with peers and educators, creating a supportive learning community. Lewis (n.d.) goes on to say that involvement, on the other hand, refers to deep engagement in activities, promoting curiosity and sustained attention. Children who

are deeply involved are more likely to participate actively, leading to richer learning experiences and deep-level learning, where they make meaningful connections and understand concepts more thoroughly. So, as a summary they believe that by assessing and promoting these aspects, the Leuven Scale helps educators create environments where children can thrive emotionally, socially, and cognitively, supporting their holistic development.

Section 4

According to Neaum (2016, cited in Gocke, 2020) observing is a widely used educational tool for researchers and teachers. Observing play is the best way to understand young children's learning and development. Through observing play, teachers and researchers can gather information about each child's learning capacity, interests, and underlying motivations for certain behaviours. These observations can inform the best individualized educational practices and theories. Lam (2008, cited in Gocke, 2020) suggested that since young children are familiar with their classroom surroundings, the most appropriate way of assessment for young children would be the observation of play and classroom activities rather than using standardized tests. Againststate that observing children's play offers numerous benefits in both developmental and educational contexts. By observing play in preschools, teachers and researchers can gather authentic and detailed information to inform their curricula and research. The resulting data, such as photos, videos, anecdotes, vignettes and scales, can be shared with other stakeholders and families to make joint decisions about the child's needs. This observational data can be stored in the child's portfolio, which may also include interviews with children about their play experiences and preferences, reflecting their development and growth over time.

National Literacy Trust (2024) believe that play is essential for children's holistic development, supporting their communication, language skills, learning and overall well-being. It offers opportunities for children to explore their voices, practice language, develop cognitive skills and enhance creativity. They continue to say that play is inclusive and supports various forms of communication, including body language and facial expressions. It aids in developing physical and motor skills, promoting health and coordination. National Literacy Trust (2024) also believe that play allows children to practice and embed deeper learning through experimentation, fostering natural curiosity and independence. It also helps children manage their feelings, build resilience and develop empathy, while fostering a love for learning and imagination.

Ward (2024) states that observing children is crucial to understanding their unique needs, tracking developmental milestones and planning purposeful activities. It helps identify their strengths, challenges and interests, allowing educators to create meaningful learning experiences.

Observation goes beyond just watching; it involves truly seeing each child for who they are and meeting them at their level of development. By mastering observation skills, educators can build strong, trusting relationships with the children in their care.

McMahon and Dyer (2019) believe that observation is important, it is crucial to remember that the starting point should be the child's natural curiosity about the world. They state that this needs to be supported by providing play opportunities with resources that foster, rather than limit, their imagination. Creativity is not just about art and music but also about exploring different ways of doing things and thinking innovatively.

McMahon and Dyer (2019) continue to say that it involves asking questions such as 'what happens if I do this?' and 'can this be done differently?' It is about viewing the world as an interconnected place rather than divided into separate lessons. A creative practitioner is someone who observes, listens and remembers the wonder of new experiences, giving children the time to develop their skills, consolidate their learning and build a lifelong passion for exploration.

Louis (2022 p. 8.) states that Froebel believed that educators gain valuable insights by observing children, especially when they engage in self-chosen play. These observations help create a learning environment that responds to and connects with children's actions. Observation allows educators to understand children better and build stronger relationships with them. It also presents opportunities to help children think, discover, explore, and develop new skills. Louis (2022) continues to say that babies and young children in early years settings need a key person to feel secure and supported as they develop their ideas under the watchful eye of a reflective educator. Froebel emphasized the importance of relationships in observations, noting that collaboration between educators and parents/carers can significantly enhance children's development when based on close observations.

Reference list

Azilo Training (n.d.) *The Importance of Observation in Childcare Settings*. Available at: [The Importance of Observation in Childcare Settings | AziloTraining](#) (Accessed: 12 February 2025).

Care learning (2024) *What is child-led play in Early years?* Available at: [What is Child-Led Play in Early Years? – Care Learning](#) (Accessed: 9 February 2025).

Care Learning (2025) *3.1 Explain the importance of observation in understanding children's play*. Available at: [3.1 Explain the importance of observation in understanding children's play – Care Learning](#) (Accessed: 5 February 2025).

Early Education (2021) *Friedrich Froebel*. Available at: [Friedrich Froebel - Early Education](#) (Accessed: 9 February 2025).

Egersdorff, S. and Mundy, P. (2017) *Maslow's hierarchy of needs in children's development: Exploring eating, sleeping, playing and learning as key elements*. Available at: [Maslow's hierarchy of needs in children's development | Community Playthings](#) (Accessed: 5 February 2025).

Freeman, E. (2023) *A family psychology expert explains the surprising benefits of rough-and-tumble play for kids*. Available at: [A family psychology expert explains the surprising benefits of rough-and-tumble play for kids](#) (Accessed: 1 February 2025).

Glow Scotland (n.d.a) *Block Play*. Available at: [Block Play – Early Level Portal](#) (Accessed: 1 February 2025).

Glow Scotland (n.d.b) *Block Play – the benefits*. Available at: [Block Play – the benefits – Early Level Portal](#) (Accessed: 1 February 2025).

Gocke, K. (2020) 'Observing young children's play: a brief review', *Gyermeknevelés*, 7(2-3), pp. 20-27. DOI: 10.31074/2019232027

Jantz, J. (2022) *What Is Rough and Tumble Play? An Educator's Guide*. Available at: [What Is Rough and Tumble Play? An Educator's Guide | Rasmussen University](#) (Accessed: 1 February 2025).

Ledendecker, M. (2020a) *Why Encourage Self-Directed Play?* Available at: [Why Encourage Self-Directed Play?](#) (Accessed: 8 February 2025).

Ledendecker, M. (2020b) *Why Encourage Self-Directed Play?* Available at: [Why Encourage Self-Directed Play?](#) (Accessed: 8 February 2025).

Lewis, K. (n.d.) *Ferre Laevers emotional well being and involvement scales (Leuven Scale)*. Available at: [Ferre Laevers emotional well being and involvement scales](#) (Accessed: 23 February 2025).

Louis, S. (2022) *A Froebelian approach observing young children* p. 8. Available at: [Observing young children](#) (Accessed: 23 February 2025).

Mathews, S. (n.d.) *The 6 Different Stages Of Play In Early Childhood According To Mildred Parten*. Available at: [The 6 Different Stages of Play](#) (Accessed: 5 February 2025).

McMahon, S and Dyer, M. (2019) *Advanced Work-based Practice in the Early Years*. Oxon: Routledge.

McRae, C and Jones, L. (2020) 'A philosophical reflection on the "Leuven Scale" and young children's expressions of involvement', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 36(2) pp. 234-246.

Moorhouse (n.d.) *The Leuven Well-being and Involvement scales*. Available at: [irresistible-learning.co.uk Pete Moorhouse](#) (Accessed: 15 February 2025).

National Literacy Trust (2024) *10 reasons why play is important*. Available at: [Early learning: 10 reasons why play is important | Early Words Matter | National Literacy Trust](#) (Accessed: 17 February 2025).

Perry, E. (2014) *Making sense of play: supporting children in their play*. Berkshire: Open university press.

Play Adventures (n.d.) *Self Directed Play*. Available at: [Self Directed Play | PlayAdventures](#) (Accessed: 8 February 2025).

Play Scotland (2025) *What is Play*. Available at: [What is Play - Play Scotland](#) (Accessed: 28 January 2025).

Play Wales (2017) *Play types*. Available at: [Play Types - Play Wales](#) (Accessed: 1 February 2025).

Rymanowicz, K. (2015) *The power of play – Part 5: Adult roles in child's play*. Available at: [The power of play – Part 5: Adult roles in child's play - MSU Extension](#) (Accessed: 9 February 2025).

Salma (2023) *The Benefits of Block Play for Young Children*. Available at: [The Power of Block Play: Boosting Child Development](#) (Accessed: 5 February 2025).

Scottish Social Services Council (n.d.) *Observing Children*. Available at: [Observing children](#) (Accessed: 12 February 2025).

Ward, S. (2024) *The Power of Observation in Early Childhood Education: Understanding and Supporting Each Child's Unique Journey*. Available at: [The Power of Observation in Early Childhood Education: Understanding and Supporting Each Child's Unique Journey | MECTA](#) (Accessed: 17 February 2025).

Welsh Government (2023a) *Early childhood play, learning and care: Developmental pathways 0 to 3*. Available at: [Early childhood play, learning and care: Developmental pathways 0 to 3](#) (Accessed: 8 February 2025).

Welsh Government (2023b) *Enabling learning* Available at: [Enabling learning - Hwb](#) (Accessed: 9 February 2025).