

I have not used AI in this assignment.

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Children's play, theory and practice.Section 1

Firstly, all children can enjoy and thrive off play, says Starting Blocks (2024). They also believe play is an activity where children demonstrate their capability for investigating fantasy and curiosity and are encouraged to make their own choices. There are many different types of play that can benefit children. Some examples of play that can be known to be children's favourites are "physical play," imaginative play, and experimental play. Physical play is useful for children as it encourages children to develop their gross motor skills and helps produce stronger muscles and bones for children. Imaginative play allows children to display their ideas and thoughts through play and encourages children to interact with other children and adults. Imaginative play also encourages children to display their emotions it can also support critical thinking (HE,2022). Physical play is supported in childcare settings, as most settings have different types of equipment for children to encourage them to go outside and play. Schools also encourage PE days, sports days, and active break times to encourage all children to be active in a fun and engaging environment (Boom Sports, 2024). However, Howard J. (2020) believes a recurring problem that is faced in child care settings is children feeling unsafe in the outdoor area. Children are shown to be anxious about situations that are brought to them and feel safer on technology. Imaginative play is also supported in childcare settings, as according to Tulsa World (2012), their video suggests that imaginative play is very useful in childcare settings, as children are more likely to be provided with "open-ended" objects, for example, blocks, loose parts, and animals. These encourage children to have multiple ideas of how to use the open-ended objects. This links to Reggio's approach, as Reggio's approach allows children to focus on the world around them and encourages them to progress in their learning (100 toys,2023). The video also suggests the practitioner should allow children to make their own choice whether they want to transfer objects between activities, practitioners should encourage children to play and support the children when needing it however, practitioners should not be leading the play.

Adding to this, there are many different types of play for children. Some examples of these are "unoccupied play," solo play, and observing through play. These are just

some types of play children tend to explore while completing their milestones. Unoccupied play is children from birth to three months of age often instead of playing, children at this stage investigate their surroundings by monitoring them. They explore while standing immobile or make disorderly movements. Instead of attempting to play, children enjoy analysing their surroundings by monitoring the children and objects closely. Another stage children often go through is solo play. Through this stage, children may play alone and explore different activities by themselves. While children are independently playing, they are also developing their imagination, encouraging children's confidence, and improving their cognitive development. This stage is often noticed when children are at the age of 3 months to 2 years old. When children are in childcare settings, a stage children can go through is observing through play. This stage allows children to assess other children while they are playing. While children are in this stage, they are often two to three years old and are learning social skills and noticing how different relationships can form with children (Waters-Davies, 2022).

In addition, according to early childhood education in Ethiopia, (2024), play is beneficial for all children, as children often use play to understand and comprehend problems and learn from those problems. Play encourages children to imagine scenarios and experience more while interacting with their peers in the setting. This links to Vygotsky, as he believes children's intellectual development is often supported by children's social skills and development, which then supports children's critical thinking (Kozulin, 2003). Also, play supports children's holistic development in many different ways for example children learn to take turns while playing with other children, they learn different shapes and sizes, they are encouraged to take risks while playing and are able to see the outcomes of risky play. However, play also can affect children who have different abilities some children can get irritated if they are unable to complete tasks other children are able to complete (WJEC, 2019).

Section 2

Secondly, self-directed play is also a very useful and helpful technique practitioners allow and encourage children to do. Self-directed play is suggested to encourage independent playing, without adult supervision, and without a structured plan (Play

Adventures, 2019). According to The Montessori School (2020), self-directed is shown to be important for all children to experience, as it encourages children to have ongoing ideas on what to create using simple objects, for example, sticks, cardboard, and many more these may also be known as loose parts. Self-directed play allows children to feel confident and successful and improves their critical thinking. It is important for adults to not intrude on the children's imagination however, often children may ask for some support or advice on how to improve their design. It is important for the adults to follow and respect the children's ideas, as the children may feel pleased and proud of themselves. To add to this, The Steiner Connection (2022) also agrees with the source, as he has stated children's growth relies on self-directed play it can provide multiple different opportunities to enhance children's learning and develop their freedom, imagination, and "problem-solving" abilities. Self-directed play also encourages children to become more resilient and encouraged to risky play. According to Fatma and Tantekin (2018), risky play encourages adults to understand and challenge children's limits. It can encourage children to overcome their own fears and encourage children to become more confident in themselves. The article also says risky play is important as it encourages children to be more enthusiastic about playing, this links to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as Article 31, "Children should be able to relax and play in all environments" (UNICEF, 1989).

Adding to this, adults in settings also support self-directed play, as most adults encourage children to lead their own play and provide themselves with their own activities. Children often lead the adults to their games and can request them to play along with them. The website also suggests that when adults take charge of children playing, children struggle to build and improve their independence. When adults take charge, children often lose the opportunity to have freedom through their play. The website also advises adults working in childcare settings to play along with the children and observe the activity to suggest how to improve it (Michigan State University, 2015). Maslow also links to this, as Maslow has five different needs. Maslow believes it is important for all children to have access to all these needs to encourage children's development however, according to Maslow's pyramid, "self-esteem" supports self-directed play as it encourages and ensures all children have

the confidence and independence to play and support other children in the setting (Stoyanov, S., 2017).

Also, according to Lovevery (2024), independent play is very useful for children. Independent play means children playing alone in their house or in childcare settings. The source states when children are independently playing they often ensure they have an adult alongside them for support and guidance this allows children to feel safe and secure which allows them to feel more confident while playing. Furthermore, the article states independent play is important for all children as it improves children's holistic development by allowing children to problem-solve and providing children with open-ended toys for them to explore. Also, when encouraging children to play independently, children can improve their emotions and personality and are able to compose their feelings. In addition, another source that also agrees with this is the Montgomery Childcare Association (2023). This blog states independent play is useful for all children to experience, as independent play encourages children to express themselves through creativity and inspires children to socialise more with other children and not only key adults. This links to the play policy, as the play policy explains that to encourage all children to play, practitioners need to ensure all children have the opportunity to play (gov. Wales, 2014).

Section 3

To continue, according to Azilo Training (2019), observations are often used in childcare settings to encourage learning and development of the children. The website also states the observation technique is used throughout children's time in settings to allow practitioners to assess children while they spend time investigating areas. According to Building Blocks (2013), observing children is important in childcare settings, as observing allows practitioners to deepen their knowledge of the children and be able to support children academically as well as support their holistic development. The blog also states that observing children allows practitioners to create new and engaging activities for children to support the skills they need extra support with.

Adding to this, an observation skill that is commonly used in settings is narrative observation. Narrative observation is very organised and provides detail about the children in the observation (Bruce, Louis, McCall, 2015). Another source that agrees

with this is Twinkl (2024). The website states the narrative technique is a useful tool for practitioners to use, as they are able to note useful and informative notes about the children. This observation can take a long time to carry out, which encourages the children to concentrate on the activity, which helps develop children's cognitive development. Most settings use post it notes while completing their narrative observing using post it notes, which allows you to observe children secretly without children noticing. Practitioners also are able to place the post it notes in a folder (Brodie, 2017). When children are being observed, the practitioners ensure they are focusing on benefiting and improving children's development. This links to Susan Isaacs theory. Isaac explores children's development while children are playing, as she believes children often use play as a way to express themselves (Smidt, 2015).

In addition, there are many benefits of using narrative observation for example, according to Connect Childcare (2024), using this method helps provide the adults with detailed information guid about the children, which can be used to present to the children's guardians. The source also suggests that by using this method, all the adults that need to be introduced to the information all receive the same information and all agree to provide support that best suits the children. However, some settings may disagree with using the narrative method, as adults often notice a lot of the time if adults are observing children, and they notice most children will respond a different way, which leads to adults not receiving an accurate observation. Another reason practitioners may not use the narrative method is that it often uses a lot of time and can be difficult to manage with a lot of children (Haddad, no date).

On one hand, there are many different types of observations different settings use, for example, time trackers and interaction trackers. These observations are useful for settings to use, as they accompany the children and observe how long they spend interacting with other children and activities. By being alongside the children while they are in their activities, the practitioners are able to note down the relationships with other children and how to benefit their development. This type of observation also is a great tool for precise time management (Larger Family Life, 2021). On the other hand, Teach Early Years (2025) explains tracking observations needs to be completed often in order to successfully complete the observation this can be shown to be challenging in a more open environment as they may not have enough time. Most settings believe narrative observations are more useful for practitioners as they

allow you to zoom in on the children's interests, you are also able to compare previous results to the newer results and be able to clearly see the progress made by the children. Using the narrative tool, you are also able to identify children's behaviours in different scenarios and come up with solutions on how to prevent these behaviours from recurring (Connect Childcare, 2024) .

To continue, when adults complete their observation by using the narrative form, practitioners are able to identify and focus on children's holistic development. Practitioners are able to investigate children's holistic development while children are playing in their environment and interacting with other children. Practitioners are encouraged to observe children's reactions and relationships with each other. The website also suggests that when completing these observations on the children, it is very useful to write down information on what you see and how children travel to different activities, as this provides the practitioners with knowledge on what skills the children may need extra support in developing. The practitioners are then able to find solutions to provide that support (Twinkl ,2024). In order to provide targeted support that promotes children's overall well-being, practitioners can gain a comprehensive understanding of children's development by observing them in many different circumstances. Practitioners are then able to supervise children's learning & development in a variety of subject areas by using holistic findings (Connect Childcare, 2023) .

Section 4

To begin with, according to Howard and McInnes (2013), they believe there are more children attending settings with psychological well-being problems. Children are found to be attending approachable activities and displaying their emotions while they play, practitioners are now encouraged, while setting up activities, to plan as if they were children playing in the area. Play is often used to encourage children to express how they feel. According to Family Lives (2025), play is important for children to experience, as play encourages children to strengthen their knowledge and improve their growth, play allows children to feel like they have a sense of belonging, and allows children to lead their own play. Practitioners often observe children while they are playing, as children are more likely to feel confident and comfortable while playing with the other children in their setting, which can allow

practitioners to have a clear view of the children's skills and development. Another website also states that it is also useful for children to be playing while the adults are observing them, as the adults are able to use their "observational skills" and pay attention to the children communicating to staff and other children in the setting (West Sussex County Council, 2021). Adding to this, another source that also agrees it is useful when children are playing while being observed is that you are able to support and advise children when needed, which can allow children to have a greater chance at succeeding in their activities and encourage them to interact with other children (HWB, no date). This links to Vygotsky, as he believes children often socialise with other children and often observe them, which allows children to become greater in their learning (Smidt, S., 2015).

To conclude, practitioners are able to support children to play in settings by encouraging them to make independent resolutions to allow children to explore their surroundings. Another way adults can support children in playing is by creating a safe, welcoming, and happy environment for all the children to feel happy and confident in their surroundings and ensuring all objects are accessible for the children (birth to 5 matters, no date). This links to the areas of learning, as they have six different areas, which is useful to have in your settings. These six areas respond to the four purposes, as they all ensure settings are ready for children to come and learn and play (Welsh Government, 2020). A source that also agrees with this is Moyles, J. (2015). She believes children's emotions should be considered while the settings are creating new activities, children should be provided with "sensory time" to allow children to display their emotions and be supported in how to regulate them. However, Moyles also states there are some settings that focus on the "curriculum" and ensure children focus on their education and then are rewarded towards the end of the week with games and different activities.

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