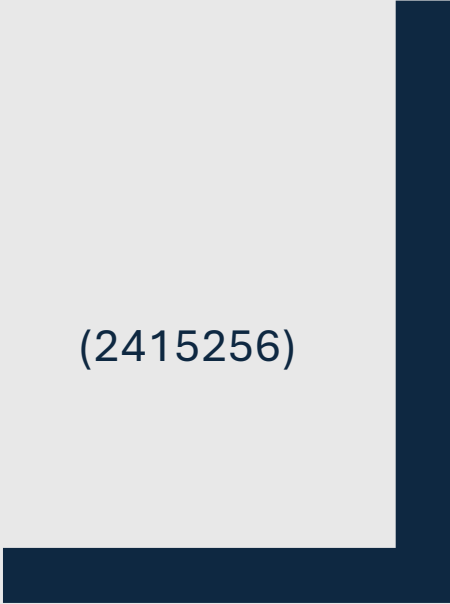




Leadership Skills in Entrepreneurship

ECEY6012

(2415256)



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AI Statement – Basic Acknowledgement of AI Tool Use

I acknowledge the use of ChatGPT (<https://chat.openai.com/>) on 28th February 2026 and subsequent drafting dates to support proofreading, spelling and grammar correction, sentence refinement, clarity, and improvement of academic tone within this assignment.

I used prompts such as:

1. "Please can you check this assignment for grammatical and syntactical mistakes and suggest clearer phrasing."
2. "Please review this updated version for grammar, syntax, clarity and academic tone."

AI was used solely to support language refinement and structural clarity. All critical analysis, theoretical discussion, argument development and referencing decisions are my own.

I confirm that I have not presented AI-generated ideas as my own work. I confirm that I retain copies of drafts, notes and preparatory materials created before and after the use of AI tools, which I may be asked to provide as evidence.



CREATIVE CRAFTERS INCLUSIVE STEAM AFTER- SCHOOL PROVISION

ECEY6012

Prepared for :

Ken Dicks

Prepared by :

Nicola Carr (2415256)

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Research

The Creative Crafters after-school proposal seeks not merely to address a local childcare gap but to reposition after-school provision as enrichment-led, inclusive and developmentally purposeful within contemporary Welsh educational reform. While Part 1 outlined its structural design, a deeper critical analysis is required to interrogate its theoretical grounding, competitive positioning, safeguarding implications and long-term sustainability. This evaluation therefore considers not only the strengths of the model, but also the tensions, risks and ethical responsibilities embedded within its implementation.

The model draws significantly upon Play Wales (2023) playwork principles and Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory. Play Wales (2023) defines play as freely chosen, intrinsically motivated and personally directed. However, at first glance, structured STEAM-themed sessions may appear to conflict with this ethos. Moss (2013) and Gray (2013) both argue that increasing emphasis on structured, outcome-focused activities risks reducing child autonomy and transforming free play into adult-directed instruction, a process often described as the "schoolification" of childhood. From this perspective, themed programming could be perceived as shifting control from child initiation to adult intention, thereby constraining the unpredictability and intrinsic motivation central to playwork philosophy (Play Wales, 2023). Hughes (2012) further argues that within playwork theory, excessive adult intervention constitutes "adulteration," whereby practitioner-led structuring disrupts the natural play cycle. The concern, therefore, is that predetermined themes or learning intentions risk displacing child agency and diminishing intrinsic motivation. Any enrichment-led model must therefore critically interrogate how structure is implemented to avoid replicating school-like control within leisure contexts. However, structure and autonomy need not be mutually exclusive. Vygotsky (1978) proposes that learning is socially mediated and that carefully scaffolded interaction within the Zone of Proximal Development can extend cognitive

development without displacing agency. Adult facilitation may enrich play when participation remains voluntary and responsive. Mahoney, Larson and Eccles (2005) argue that structured yet flexible out-of-school environments can enhance creativity, executive functioning and social competence when children retain autonomy and meaningful engagement. This distinction becomes particularly significant during extended school holiday periods. Alexander, Entwisle and Olson (2007) demonstrate that prolonged breaks from structured learning environments are associated with regression in academic skills and widening attainment gaps, particularly among vulnerable learners. Within this context, structured yet play-based holiday provision may operate not as schoolification, but as protective continuity. The Welsh Government (2021), in outlining the ALN Code, recognises that predictable routines and responsive environments are central to reducing anxiety and supporting children whose needs may be heightened by disruption. For children with ALN, thematic coherence and sensory-aware settings can therefore provide stability during otherwise unstructured periods. Structure, in this sense, may function not as control but as containment, a framework within which autonomy can safely and confidently operate. Within Creative Crafters, themes function not as prescriptive scripts but as narrative scaffolds. Rather than dictating outcomes, themed contexts provide shared imaginative frameworks through which children exercise individual agency. Participation remains voluntary, and completion is neither time-bound nor assessed. In this sense, structure operates as a contextual anchor rather than a directive mechanism. Drawing on Nicholson's (1971) theory of loose parts, the provision integrates open-ended materials, recycled resources and adaptable tools that increase variability and creative possibility. Nicholson (1971) argues that environments rich in moveable and combinable materials expand imaginative potential and problem-solving capacity. By embedding loose parts within thematic frameworks, Creative Crafters seeks to balance the playwork commitment to child initiation with the cognitive and social benefits associated with enriched environments. Structure therefore becomes a facilitator of possibility rather than a constraint upon autonomy. Vygotsky (1978) argues that learning is mediated through guided interaction within the Zone of Proximal Development, suggesting that adult facilitation can extend cognitive growth without displacing agency. However, scholars

such as Gray (2013) and Hughes (2012) caution that excessive scaffolding risks instrumentalising play, shifting it from intrinsically motivated exploration toward adult-directed activity. Within playwork discourse, this concern is framed as “adulteration,” where practitioner intervention interrupts the integrity of the play cycle (Hughes, 2012). The Creative Crafters model attempts to negotiate this tension by offering thematic frameworks without prescribed outcomes, providing multiple activity stations, removing time-bound completion expectations and allowing children to select and revisit tasks at their own pace. Nevertheless, this balance is inherently fragile. Reflective leadership is required to prevent drift either toward rigid adult direction or toward overly loose supervision that lacks developmental intentionality (Schön, 1983). Furthermore, regulatory frameworks such as those overseen by Care Inspectorate Wales emphasise observable safeguarding compliance and environmental organisation (Care Inspectorate Wales, 2023). While essential for accountability, inspection discourse may not always explicitly engage with the theoretical nuances of playwork philosophy. Practitioners must therefore ensure that theoretical integrity is not lost in the pursuit of demonstrable structure. This tension between structure and autonomy has long been debated within early years pedagogy. Froebel (1887) conceptualised play as the highest expression of human development, arguing that adult presence should nurture rather than direct. Montessori (1912) similarly emphasised carefully prepared environments that support independence through intentional resource selection. While Creative Crafters operates within a themed structure rather than a traditional Montessori classroom, the principle of purposeful environment design remains central. Materials are curated to invite exploration, repetition and mastery rather than prescribe identical outcomes. The integration of loose parts further reflects Nicholson’s (1971) theory that environments rich in variable materials enhance creativity and engagement. Open-ended craft resources, recycled materials and accessible tools allow children to construct individual interpretations rather than replicate adult templates. This approach aligns with the playwork understanding of the play cycle, in which children initiate cues and adults respond sensitively without premature intervention (Play Wales, 2023). Interestingly, children within Creative Crafters frequently invite practitioners into their play. Rather than indicating dependency, this may reflect relational safety. When adults

position themselves as playful collaborators rather than authoritative supervisors, children may perceive them as co-constructors within the play space. Vygotsky's (1978) emphasis on socially mediated learning supports the interpretation that such adult participation can extend, rather than diminish, developmental opportunity. The developmental implications of this model extend across cognitive, social and emotional domains. Hands-on craft activities require planning, sequencing and problem-solving, supporting executive function development consistent with Vygotskian theory. Fine motor repetition strengthens coordination, particularly relevant for children with dyspraxia or delayed motor skills. Socially, shared table-based creation fosters negotiation, communication and peer modelling, aligning with the Curriculum for Wales emphasis on learner agency and expressive arts (Welsh Government, 2022). Emotionally, creative expression offers opportunities for regulation following cognitively demanding school days. Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs positions safety and belonging as prerequisites for higher-order development. The explicit reassurance that children will not be forced to remain distressed, and that parents will be contacted if necessary, reinforces psychological safety and may enhance children's willingness to take creative risks. The inclusive ethos of the model is further strengthened through the lens of Double Empathy Theory. Milton (2012) challenges deficit-based interpretations of neurodivergence, proposing that communication breakdown arises from mutual misunderstanding between neurotypes rather than impairment alone. Within Creative Crafters, staff lived experience of dyslexia, ADHD and sensory differences may contribute to heightened attunement to children with diverse processing profiles. While lived experience does not replace safeguarding protocol, it may enhance empathetic interpretation and reduce pathologising responses. Observations from visitors noting that sessions remain calm despite high engagement suggest effective regulatory containment. However, such calm must be actively structured through predictable routines and environmental organisation, particularly within shared community hall spaces. Competitive positioning introduces further complexity. The established local charity-run provision has operated for over fifteen years, maintains full capacity and offers longer hours at a lower daily cost. As a CIW-registered provider, it must meet statutory adult-child ratios and qualification standards (Care Inspectorate Wales, 2023).

Regulatory compliance therefore does not constitute differentiation. Creative Crafters differentiates itself through pedagogical identity: structured enrichment as organising principle rather than supplementary activity. The Lisvane holiday provision provides operational evidence of viability through sustained attendance and repeat bookings. Regular commissioning by other provisions, including the closing Gap Club, offers sector validation of quality. However, differentiation alone does not guarantee parental choice. Kotler *et al.* (2016) emphasise that in community-based services, trust frequently outweighs product differentiation. Long-standing charitable presence generates relational inertia, with familiarity often equated to safety. Without disciplined articulation of developmental benefit, premium positioning risks appearing exclusionary rather than purposeful. While a £3 daily increase may appear marginal, over a 38-week academic year this equates to approximately £570 for a child attending five days per week. In the context of rising living costs, this is a significant cumulative consideration. Behavioural economics suggests that recurring small costs are evaluated differently from one-off expenditures, yet cumulative framing can influence decision-making once made explicit (Kahneman, 2011). Parents may therefore adopt hybrid strategies, allocating attendance across multiple provisions to balance financial prudence with perceived enrichment value. Thaler's (1999) concept of mental accounting explains how families distribute expenditure according to perceived benefit categories. Yet parental decision-making within childcare contexts is rarely purely economic. Hochschild (1997) describes the emotional tension experienced by working parents navigating the "time bind," where guilt associated with time away from children intensifies concern about care quality. Kahneman's (2011) distinction between intuitive and analytical reasoning suggests that emotional reassurance may outweigh cost comparison. If children express enthusiasm, pride and attachment to a provision, parents may reinterpret additional cost as investment in wellbeing. Lareau (2011) proposes that many families engage in "concerted cultivation," seeking structured enrichment perceived to contribute to developmental advantage. While Creative Crafters must guard against exclusivity, its structured STEAM orientation may align with parental aspirations for creative growth. Trust formation is deeply relational. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) mesosystem highlights the importance of strong home–education linkages. When parents receive individualised

daily feedback and observe visible safeguarding structures, perceived risk decreases. Reichheld (2003) argues that loyalty develops when customers perceive meaningful added value rather than incremental improvement. In small school communities, positive word-of-mouth significantly influences enrolment. When children request attendance and parents feel their child is known individually, loyalty may emerge beyond price sensitivity. Nevertheless, ethical reflection remains essential. Emotional reassurance must remain grounded in genuine safeguarding and pedagogical integrity. Relational trust is embedded structurally within Creative Crafters through the end-of-session handover model. Children are allocated into groups of eight, each assigned to a designated practitioner. The overseeing staff member dismisses children sequentially, and the allocated practitioner escorts each child to their parent with a brief verbal debrief. This system ensures safeguarding accountability while reinforcing personalised communication. In Bronfenbrenner's (1979) terms, it strengthens mesosystem connectivity. However, this relational model is labour-intensive and dependent upon staffing stability. Safeguarding complexity increases within shared community hall environments. CIW guidance (Care Inspectorate Wales, 2023) emphasises secure entry systems, risk assessment and supervision visibility. Shared-use venues introduce unpredictability, overlapping bookings and environmental constraints that may disproportionately affect children with sensory sensitivities. Mitigation requires environmental zoning, written agreements with hall management and disciplined supervision. While community halls reduce infrastructure cost, they increase safeguarding demands. Financial viability introduces further ethical tension. Break-even modelling at thirteen to fourteen children demonstrates prudent planning, yet pricing at £15 per session may risk socio-economic stratification. Welsh Government (2024) highlights ongoing cost-of-living pressures. If enrichment becomes perceived as premium rather than essential, accessibility may narrow. Exploration of subsidised places or partnership funding may therefore be required to align entrepreneurial viability with inclusive values. Regulatory transparency shapes perception. Operating under the two-hour exemption (Welsh Government, 2016) is lawful but may be misinterpreted without clear communication. CIW registration timelines may extend to thirteen weeks (Welsh Government, 2019). Transparency protects reputational integrity, particularly in

light of recent safeguarding failures within neighbouring provisions. Expansion opportunities must be approached cautiously to avoid growth exceeding infrastructure. Scalability presents both opportunity and risk. Burns (2016) emphasises that sustainable growth depends upon systemisation and quality assurance. Franchising or multi-site expansion introduces governance complexity and safeguarding variability. Replication must therefore be contingent upon centralised training and monitoring. Ultimately, the proposal reflects a practitioner-entrepreneur identity. This dual perspective strengthens operational realism yet risks optimism bias. Reflective practice (Schön, 1983) requires ongoing critical self-evaluation. Questions persist regarding balance between enrichment and free play, accessibility and sustainability, innovation and regulation. In conclusion, the Creative Crafters model is theoretically grounded, policy-aligned and strategically differentiated. It offers developmental benefit through creative autonomy and relational partnership. However, its long-term viability depends upon disciplined safeguarding, ethical pricing, workforce sustainability and sustained community trust. It does not merely replace a closing provision; it seeks to reposition after-school childcare within Welsh educational reform as enrichment-led and developmentally purposeful. Its success will depend not on innovation alone, but on reflective implementation and accountable growth.

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