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ECEY4003: children's play theory and practice

Sections

Section 1 – Types of play

Section 2 – child led play

Section 3 – Observation

Section 4 – Observation and play

AI Statement.

I have used AI to Alphabetise my reference list

Section 1 – Types of play

Evidence of a clear understanding of the importance of a variety of play types.

The significant of holistic development should be considered.

Children thrive from being given a variety of engaging play opportunities. When a practitioner understands the different aspects of play and is able give children these opportunities of play are regularly, they are able to promote the child's holistic growth and development.

Children develop through a series of play stages, the earliest stage is unoccupied and solitary play this is where children build their confidence and explore their environment independently developing their concentration, self-awareness and their coordination. As children grow, they will move onto parallel play, where observing and playing alongside others will begin to support the development of their social skills, communication and understanding social situations. Next will come cooperative play this involves problem solving, teamwork, empathy and role taking. Each stage of play shows us that it is essential for holistic development and not just something fun for children to do. The Welsh curriculum has a strong emphasis on play including child led play and believe that when play is observed and reflected on effectively it give the practitioners the opportunity to plan purposeful lessons to support the child's holistic development "we can plan experiences that follow their interests, support their well-being, and help them take their next steps in learning and development. Observation sits at the heart of assessment and planning, helping us respond in ways that truly meet the needs of every baby and young child in our care." (Welsh Government, 2025).

When working with children it is important that practitioners can support and understand all the aspects of play. The six main types of play, these are of the following

- Physical play – this supports gross and fine motor skills and develops a child's coordination skills
- Creative play – this encourages imagination, self-expression and problem solving
- Social play - develops a child's communication and language skills, develops turn taking and cooperation skills and emotional development

- Role/ pretend play – Supports language development and understanding of the world around them
- Constructive play – builds a child concentration, resilience, fine and gross motor and early maths and science skills
- Sensory play – will support cognitive development and exploration skills

All types of play are important for children's development as play is essential for learning and development, During play many areas of a child's development are supported simultaneously for example when a child is engaged in the role play they will develop a range of skills that will support their overall development this includes learning new vocabulary in meaningful context this then strengthen their cognitive development. Role play will also support children's emotional development allowing them to explore their feelings, express their emotions and learn to understand others' emotions and feeling in a safe and encouraging environment. When a child is playing it is important that we understand a child's development is interlinked

Holistic play is seeing that child is an individual where cognitive, physical, emotional and social development are interconnected. When working with children it is important that practitioners are giving children the opportunities to develop a variety of play that supports children being exposed to inclusive, balanced and meaningful development. The significance of Holistic play aligns with Vygotsky's view that social interaction is fundamental to leaning children's learning, social interaction plays a crucial role. "Children go through a continuous process of learning through such social experiences" (Md Yusof2021). This shows us that Vygotsky believed that when children are given the correct social activities with guided support from an adult and peer interaction children are then able to scaffold those skills within the Zone of Proximal development. Like Vygotsky, Maria Montessori recognised the importance of play and how play is a vital for a child's development and learning. Montessori believed that when children play it should be natural and self-directed from them "Maria Montessori observed that children possess an innate desire to explore their environment, and she believed that education should align with this natural curiosity" (Wrexham University, 2024). Montessori believed that practitioners should create authentic and meaningful learning environments where play is real life based, practical and purposeful. Montessori believed that the role of the adult in children's play was observe and to guide when needed. Both theorists offer different

approaches to understanding how children learn through play both Vygotsky's and Montessori theories give practitioners a valuable insight for supporting play within the early years practice.

Section 2 - Child led play

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.

Play Wales states "Every child has the right to play. This means every single child, whatever their culture, impairment, gender, language, background, behaviour or need. (Play Wales, n.d) this documents along with the United Nations Conventions on the rights of the child (UNCRC) recognise that it is fundamental for child to play as play supports all aspects of their development.

It is also essential that children are given the opportunity to choose their own play as it promotes their independence, motivation and engagement by encouraging them to make decisions, problem solve and explore their surrounding confidently. When a child can do this, it will intern supports their cognitive, social, emotional and physical development. When children are given opportunities to choose their own play it is sometimes called self-directed play or child-led play this is when the child chooses what they want to play, how they want to play and who they want to play with rather than the adult directing them. When play is child led it give the child the opportunity to explore and experiment and problem solve at their own pace this supports the child to become more resilient and independent. Child led play has also shown to promote a child's creativity imagination, cognitive development and social skills. It is important that practitioners avoid pressuring children to interact with others as children will decided when they are ready to interact and play with peers. Child led play helps children build emotional skills including self-regulation and patience. It is also important that children to be able to select activates that are meaningful and interesting to them as this will then increase engagement and motivation in their learning. For this to be supported, practitioners must carefully observe children's interests and use their findings to create and enabling environment that is simulating and rich in learning opportunities. When the environment is rich and simulating it supports children to develop their confidence to explore independently and learn at their own pace.

The Welsh Curriculum has a focus on effective environments meaning that practitioners should provide spaces for children to explore and learn in a meaningful and authentic way. As the curriculum highlights “Through exploration of their environment, in the local community and beyond, learners begin to develop a sense of belonging and an appreciation of the world around them.” (Welsh Government, 2023) These experiences support the children's holistic development by promoting growth, physical, emotional and cognitive development as well as social skills.

When a practitioner is successful with creating a purposeful learning environment both indoor and outdoor they can support a child's holistic development allowing the child to grow and develop across their social, emotional, physical and cognitive skills through the child-centred learning experiences.

The role of the adult is significantly important acting as a facilitator by encouraging what the child wants to do rather than the adult directing the play as it then becomes an adult led activity. Practitioners have a vital role to offer a safe and inviting environment to observe the children and to offer guidance when needed by doing this the adults can ensure that play remains meaningful and challenging while still allowing the child to lead. It is important that there is a balance between the child's choice in play and the role of the adult as when this balance is achieved it will support the child's holistic development that will support the development of their confidence and resilience. Adults can support play by offering prompts and asking open ended questions and to even introduce challenges to the play but only when it is appropriate and will enhance the learning opportunities, as when this is done correctly the child is able to remain in control of the play and support deeper learning, promotes problem-solving and encourages exploration without diminishing the child's independence. In settings observations are carried out and documented through Observations Assessment and Planning (OAP) cycle “The OAP cycle is a reflective and ongoing process which enables consideration of children's development and how to support individual children through effective practice. (Early Years Coalition, 2021) When the observation is complete it is important that the practitioner reflect on the observation to gain an insight into the child's development and enable them to plan quality learning experiences that are engaging and beneficial and support the next steps in the child's learning and development.

Section 3 – Observation

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

For this section of the assignment, I have chosen to look in depth at planned narrative observations both focused and informal (in the moment) observations. These methods of observation are used regularly in my setting. Planned and in the moment narrative observations are based on the five key areas of development, these areas are

- Communication and language development
- Belonging and well-being
- Physical development
- Cognitive Development
- Social development

Each area has its own document where the practitioner will observe the child and document what they are doing, the practitioner will then analysis what they have observed and then respond where the practitioner is able to plan out the next steps where the child can progress in that area. The data collected will then also be shared with the appropriate professionals to support and enable the child is able to achieve their full protentional, Early Education (n.d.) states that “Each child’s own unique pathway of development and learning involves many elements woven together in a holistic form. Observation, assessment and planning (OAP) makes this holistic development visible, so children’s thinking and understanding can be shared with parents and carers, other professionals, and with children themselves.”

In my setting the observation documentation is then taken with the teacher to the learners progress review where they share the data from the observations with the Senior Leadership Team and they will discuss each child’s learning and development and what the next steps are for them in their learning this is also when appropriate support if needed is discussed this can include intervention groups or outside agency’s involvement the practitioner will then and plan learning and provision to meet children's interest.

There are many benefits to written observations, due to the nature of the observation method they hold detailed information about a child’s learning, behaviour and

interactions through factual records. From written observations practitioners are able to individualize planning by ensuring activities are child centred and meet each child and their individual developmental needs. Written observations provide evidence for parents and professionals that will highlight any developmental delays and will then provide the practitioner with opportunities to provide the child with intervention support or outside agency support that will help their development. Written observations can also support practitioners to reflect on their practice. By practitioners reviewing observations they are able to critically reflect on their professional practice, interactions and environment and if a child was able to access the learning by practitioners actively reflecting on what they have observed they are able to understand children's learning linking theory with practice. When undertaking any form of observation, it is important that the information collected is stored securely and kept with the class context file. This ensures any data is kept confidential but also allowing relevant staff to access the information when required. There can be a number of cost implications to the written observation as it requires a high level of practitioner time which can directly impact staffing costs. Staff also need to ensure that observations are accurate this could impact on settings investing additional money into staff training and/or coaching current staff to conduct observations correctly. Writing in-depth observations can be time consuming for the practitioner as it can be a lot of paperwork it can result in the practitioner interactions with the child and could affect the quality of day-to-day learning experiences. Written observations should also be stored correctly by ensuring that paperwork is organised and accessible preventing it from become overwhelming as without the correct organisation records can become lost and difficult to access this will then reduce the effectiveness of observations for planning, assessment and inspections. Written observations give a practitioner a holistic view of a child development Drummond stated, "Assessment is the way in which in our everyday practice, we observe children's learning, strive to understand it, and then put our understanding to good use" (Dummond 1993). Observations are essential to a child's learning as they doesn't just focus on one area of development but will enable the practitioner to focus on the five areas of development, Physical development, cognitive development, communication development, social and emotional development and creative and imaginative play giving practitioners the opportunity to plan learning and provision that will meet the children's needs both age and stage appropriate. When

practitioners are naturally observing children through a variety of activities across the five areas of development written records will show patterns and interests that will interconnect through the five areas of development and will give the practitioner a complete picture of the child. Written observations give the practitioner a holistic view of the child which is a comparison to observation methods like checklists as they tend to focus on one skill or developmental area at a time.

Section 4 - Observation and play

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

The Welsh Government recognises and embeds the importance of play throughout their policies. "We believe that children have a fundamental right to be able to play, and that play is central to their enjoyment of life and contributes to their well-being. (Welsh Government 2012) As a practitioner it is integral part to their practice that they have a strong understanding of the importance of play within a child's development. This understanding is especially important when undertaking observation assessments as the data they collect will give them a holistic view of the child's development and support the practitioner to identify the appropriate next steps in learning and development.

When children play, they are more likely to demonstrate their true selves as they will feel relaxed, motivated and engaged within play-based experiences.

When observing children through play it allows the children to express themselves naturally and to show their skills, interest and emotions in a natural and not forced way. Observing play-based contexts enable practitioners and other professionals to gain a holistic insight into the child's development. Through structure and unstructured play physical, emotional development, cognitive processing and social interaction skills are naturally shown. Play gives children the opportunity to explore and interact with their environment, peers and adults supporting again holistic development but also giving practitioners a valuable insight into the child's interest and abilities. When observations are conducted correctly, they give the practitioners the information they need to plan meaningful learning experiences that will benefit the child's development.

During play based assessments practitioners should avoid participating in the children's play as their involvement could have an influence on the child's behaviour causing the child to follow the adult expectations instead of expressing their interests through child led play.

Curriculum for Wales focuses on the four main purposes aiming to empower learners to be confident ambitious, capable and self-aware individuals who are able to achieve their full potential throughout their educational journey, and well-rounded individuals throughout their lives.

When children are fully engaged and enthusiastic in their play their intrinsic motivation is strengthened enabling them to take part in activities that will support their attention, concentration and cognitive skills. Research suggests that when play is authentic and child led it promotes a sense of calm reducing the feelings of anxiety enabling the play to be natural and spontaneous, making the child feel less like they need to perform for the observer and be their authentic self and express their true character. Observations support children's confidence by creating a safe environment where the child feels valued, secure and understood. Play provides valuable opportunities for children to develop their social skills by encouraging collaboration, communication and the development of cooperative play. Welsh Government states "Assessment plays a fundamental role in ensuring each individual learner is supported and challenged accordingly" (Welsh Government, 2020) by settings and practitioners creating authentic learning experiences they can provide an environment that a child feels safe to challenge themselves and sustain engagement.

The Welsh Government recognises that observational assessments should be a regular practice and not just a one-off snapshot of a child's development "embedding assessment into day-to-day practice" (Welsh Government, 2020) When observations are made regularly within authentic play based experiences it supports a more accurate picture of the child's abilities. Play has a significant impact on the accuracy of observations as it gives the observer a holistic view of the child's development and not isolated skills. Observations made during play opportunities can identify a child's strengths and weaknesses and can identify where extra support can be put in place to support the child's development. However, when observing children through play practitioners should be careful not to assume they understand the meaning, as an

adult could interpret play differently from the child's original intentions. Observations through play allow practitioners to gain reliable in the moment information about that child allowing practitioners to respond immediately to children's interests and needs, notice emerging skills and misconceptions providing practitioners to support future leaning.

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