

Children's play: Theory and Practice:

No AI was used in this assignment

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Section 1: Discuss two types of play and how these can be supported in practice.

The right for all children “to rest, relax and play”, is Article 31 of the international legal agreement between numerous countries called the United Nations Convention of the Rights of a Child (UNCRC), stating every child has the right to play freely in which ever method they choose (Children’s & young people’s commissioner Scotland, 2025). The UNCRC (2013) states play being a flexible, spontaneous, enjoyable and challenging, child centered activity, which is motivated and constructed by themselves anywhere at any time. The UNCRC (2013) reiterates a similar definition in the Wales play policy (2002, p4), however the play policy emphasizes the importance of play as a process of learning and a vital part of children’s holistic development and learning progression. Hughes (2012, pg96-97) discusses play as an “evolutionary mutation” with many types for children to experience, indicating each having its own identity. Hughes (2012) mentions practitioners used to observe children and categorized play as a whole. However, research has begun breaking play down and today play forms many different categories. Hughes (2012) highlights some of these play types as symbolic, creative, exploratory, mastery, deep, imaginary and role play.

Looking deeper into role play and deep play, research shows deep play is an activity which holds potential risk and danger, whilst providing challenges. Examples of these are riding bikes, jumping off objects, climbing trees to even objects such as mini saws or drills (Fennies nurseries, 2024 and Play Wales 2017). Both Fennies and Play Wales highlight the benefits of deep play as promoting children’s holistic development physically, mentally, socially as well as emotionally. Children gain physicality through gross motor skills and accessing risks. Self- esteem and emotional development are benefited through building resilience and confidence through achievement, whilst developing emotionally through overcoming fears whilst understanding how to manage stress and anxiety. Hughes (2012, p114) states how deep play is “vital for children”, however due to the current culture it is frowned upon due to safety concerns. Supporting this comment, Play Wales (2017) suggests deep play is one of the most difficult play types to enforce in settings due to professional

and human legal principles to safeguard children. Overcoming this barrier Fennies nurseries (2024) suggest that during any deep play children are supervised. Introducing deep play into settings is allowing children to engage in rough and tumble play with peers, climb trees, ride bikes and scooters, whilst also adding mini tools such as hammers and saws into constructions areas (Fennies nurseries, 2024). Play Wales (2017) associates deep play with older children whilst acknowledging that some younger children may engage in the form of deep play early on. Brodie (2024) discusses Mildred Parten's theory on the stages of play, one being solitary play. This involves children around the age of 3 months to 2 ½ years, engaging in their own interest, whilst beginning to demonstrate exploration and independent skills. Although Jerome Bruner's theory (McLeod, 2024), was that children can be taught at any age and learn through "active experiences". Bruner believed in enactive mode from birth to 1 year, where children learn through physical actions and implementation. Revisiting and increasing levels with each turn, which enhances deep play later in life.

Contrasting to deep play is role play, which involves children taking on different roles and imitating characters, people or experiences familiar to them. The reenactments scenarios such as doctors, superheroes or house require children taking particular roles, dressing up or using equipment to pretend (Play Wales, 2017 and Fennies nurseries, 2024). Unlike deep play there is a different level and concept of risk children take, the risks are through ideas, understanding boundaries and their environment which builds their identities (EYR, 2016). According to Bryce-Clegg (2015, pp87) children also develop holistically through role play as Bryce-Clegg believes, *"Role play should be at the heart of education at all developmental stages from the Early Years to University!"*. Bryce-Clegg (2015) emphasizes that children gain physically through movement and dressing, emotionally through expressing themselves and the world around, also socially through negotiating, recalling and understanding roles and responsibilities. These three developmental stages within deep and role play help structure a child's basic, psychological and self- fulfillment needs that Maslow believed to be important in children becoming self-actualized individuals (McLeod, 2024). EYR (2016) reinforces role play areas as an "integral part" of every setting, which has no structure but provides a variety of materials. Providing real life resources like bags, baskets, clothes or pieces of fabric promotes

unlimited play, while based in an area of the setting, small world tray or outside (Bryce-Clegg 2015 Fennies 2024 and Play Wales 2017). Unlike deep play which due to its risks can mainly be associated as solitary play, role play can take on a number of Parten's stages, it can be solitary where children play alone, to associative play beginning to share activities and engage with others but also co-operative play where the children work collaboratively (Brodie, 2024). Albert Bandura's belief is the influences of others, how our environments effects our personalities, which coincides with how children play in the role play areas acting out what they see, hear and feel (Nickerson, 2024).

Section 2: Evidence of 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.

Both play types mentioned above are some of the self-directed play opportunities children immerse themselves in. The Steiner connection (2022), explains that self-directed play or free play, is play that is initiated and structured by the child interests and rules. Children during this play are "completely in the moment" and this can develop from the age of 2 and a half years. Steiner connection (2022) highlights that it is different to playful learning and is not led by an adult, adult intervention should only happen to ensure safety and inclusion. Agreeing with Steiner connections (2022) definition is the Montessori school of the Berkshire (2024), adding it allows freedom for children to follow and explore their interests and ideas with who, what and how they wish. Montessori school Berkshire (2024) emphasis key factors for self-directed play as being motivated, natural, chosen and led by the children with no main goal. Self-directed play involves many stages and types of play as Aminpour, Bishop and Corkey (2020) discuss how children's physical, cognitive and social play is promoted through self-directed play. Continuing Aminpour, Bishop and Corkey (2020) states children dancing and climbing trees advocate a physical play type, however children engaging in a type of sport are not associated with self-directed play, as it has rules which were not set by children. Aminpour, Bishop and Corkey (2020) describe how cognitive play is implemented through construction and building choices and social play through dramatic play, imitating roles and scenarios. Through

self-directed play, stages of play are active as children become onlookers, begin to play parallel to another, develop associative and co-operative skills whilst also being competitive (Aminpour, Bishop and Corkey, 2020).

The Welsh government introduced a statutory guidance in 2014 called “Wales- A play friendly country” (pg17-19), which created an assessment in recognition of self-directed play. The assessment is implemented by each authority to provide play opportunities to all children. It emphasizes the role of adults to understand the connection between self-directed play and is implemented for other reasons such as structured lessons. The guidance and other sources such as Montessori school Berkshire (2024) and The Steiner connection (2022), all highlight the main roles adults have in reinforcing opportunities for self-directed play. The most important thing is providing the safe spaces, both outside and in, ensuring areas are safe and spacious to allow free movement. Another is that it is imperative to allow time for the children to explore and immerse themselves within their play and that children feel that “permission” or understanding that play is accepted by the adults (Steiner connection, 2022, Montessori school Berkshire 2024, Wales a Play friendly country 2014). The above are the most crucial roles adults can give to children to help encourage the self-directed play, although other suggestions such as resources which are simple and natural which hold multiple purposes known as “open-ended” resources are beneficial, as well as adding some closed-ended toys which have a main purpose such as dolls (Steiner connection, 2022, Montessori school Berkshire, 2024 and Wales a Play Friendly country, 2014). Wales a Play friendly country (2014), adds that adults reinforcing all of the above should also observe and only intervene if necessary for safety reasons and to avoid adulteration. Adulteration is when adults attempt to lead or intervene with the play, which affects the children’s driven play (Sands, 2013). Wales a Play Friendly country (2014) discusses through observing adults gain opportunities to understand the child at a deeper level and be able to identify particular needs a child may or may not be experiencing.

According to Aslanian, Bjercknes and Anderson (2023) self- directed play is vital to supporting children’s holistic and biosocial learning, while being the foundation to develop a passion for learning. Through implementation of self-directed play, children become self-aware of themselves, others, their environments, the world around them and build relationships, which all support children to develop perseverance,

confidence and independent skills. Agreeing with the above is Setzer (2019), who reiterates on how children develop “self-discovery, curiosity” and social skills through co-operative play. Setzer highlights other benefits self-directed play has on children’s development, discussing how children develop creatively through problem solving and gaining resilience through experiencing failure. Setzer adds children’s experimentation skills develop also, through taking risks promoting perseverance and positive attitudes. Setzer add that providing organized, appropriate materials and the ability to be flexible, encourages children’s “inner motivation and interest” in self-directed play. Supporting this progress is the Curriculum for Wales (2020), with two of the four purposes, creating ambitious and capable learners who are healthy and confident individuals.

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

Dudovskiy (2011) defines an observation as collecting information from a source through “watching, listening, reading, touching and recording behaviour”. Dudovskiy (2011) states to do this requires the observer to take notes or recordings and be engrossed in their environment. Dudovskiy (2011) discusses two types of observations, one being structured, which is to identify or seek a particular objective, whereas the other is unstructured which is more open with no desired outcome. Following on Childcare Resources (2021) describes how to observe through watching and restraining from passing judgement, to discover what the child is doing and learning. Bryce-Clegg (2015, pp17-18) highlights through observations, practitioners understand what is happening in their settings in different ways, however the most beneficial is through observing and responding. Bryce-Clegg (2015) writes how practitioners observe children to develop better understanding of how they involve themselves in the setting, their interests and thought processes yet involves the practitioners being off tasks to do so. Childcare Resources (2021) discusses how by observing, practitioners develop a better knowledge of children’s likes and dislikes, can identify any needs and how they can help engage a child within the setting supporting each individual learner. This can then lead practitioners to create environments to promote their learning through activities based on their

interests, developing an “emergent curriculum”. Childcare Resources (2021) also add observations provide connections between home and settings developing relationships.

There are a number of different observational techniques according to Brodie (no date), however writes that before implementing observations, practitioners should consider their objectives first in order to select the best option for their observation, as some techniques work better for specific developmental areas than others. One of the observation techniques Brodie (no date) discusses is a time sample, which involves observing over a large period of time, though at sections at a time. This could be over an hour yet observing every 5 minutes. Brodie (no date) states these observations are brief, indicating the area of the setting, the activity and the level of involvement. Brodie (no date) suggests this type of technique can only work observing one child, whereas Sharman, Cross and Vennis (2015) suggest in their description it can be up to two or more children. Sharman, Cross and Vennis (2015) also indicate observations within that time should be detailed and include their behaviour and the language used, whilst recording the level of engagement. Sharman, Cross and Vennis (2015) believe the advantages of using this method is it allows you to gauge the level of involvement and engagement the child or children have within the setting on certain activities. Also adding that it allows the practitioners to see children's interactions and how children follow instructions because it is quick due to normally having a pre-prepared recording sheet, unlike a narrative observation involving more writing.

However, Brodie (no date), believes this could be a challenge for practitioners, due to settings being free flow, the practitioner will need to be available to take the observations at certain times, yet does highlight recordings would take less than a few minutes to record. Early years matters (2022) talks about how this method allows practitioners to have an insight into the children's interests, behaviours and what they access more in the setting, allowing practitioners to support and enhance their planning and curriculum based on child led studies. Studies on Early childhood also cite (Butler, Parry and Spofford, 2015) who agree how time sampling can be a beneficial method of observation due to it being easy to use and understand by children, parents and practitioners helping build relationships between the setting and home environments. This type of observation also allows practitioners to

observe what areas and activities are being used effectively within the setting and if any are not engaging the children's interest, which will provide opportunities for practitioners to reuse and change the areas (Bruce, Louis and McCall, 2019).

Care learning (2024, August 31) highlights how certain observation methods such as time sampling can support holistic development in children, by allowing practitioners to understand and identify children's needs, enabling them to support their overall development. Care Learning (2024, September) discusses further that through time sampling practitioners can have beneficial insights into children's cognitive, physical and emotional development. Care Learning (2024, September) emphasizes how children's cognitive development can be observed through their critical thinking, communication and the children's engagement levels. While their physical abilities can be observed through fine and gross motor skills they implement within the setting and through observing children's social and emotional development, practitioners can identify how they interact with both peers and adults, whilst identifying how they express and regulate their emotions. Practitioners should then be able to analyze the observations and identify any needs the individual may have and create progression steps to further support their development (Care Learning 2024, September).

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

Janet Moyles (2010, pg. 202), writes how observations during play have been considered an effective way of understanding a person from as far back 347 BC, as a Greek Philosopher Plato was believed to have stated *"you can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation."* Besio *et al*, (2018) continues by highlighting how observations are still the main tool practitioners use to assess children's development. Implementing observations while children play can provide useful and clinical information as practitioners can identify children's desires and challenges through their spontaneous play. After observing, practitioners can evaluate and indicate possible areas for intervention to begin (Besio *et al*, 2018). Smidt (2015, pp38) agrees with Besio by citing Vygotsky theory that children learn

from their environments and exploration, so practitioners should assess what children already know in order to progress them further. Smidt (2025) discusses how play is the “primary mode of learning” for children especially within the early years and through observing practitioners can identify what children can do and what they know independently, to what they may require assistance with. According to Kurt (2020, pp3/4), observing children through play is the best way to learn where children are developmentally. Kurt (2020, pp 3/4) discusses how it allows practitioners to understand each individual child’s interests and behaviors. Care Learning (2025), agrees with Kurt and highlights how through observing children in play practitioners can recognize not only the children’s individual needs but also understand their development stage, allowing them to spot any areas of delay or safeguarding concerns. Care learning (2025), continues to discuss how these concerns can then be feedback to relevant professionals and help practitioners plan, change and alter the environment to meet the child or children’s needs.

Throughout Sweden “teaching and learning means the same” according to Bruce, Louis and Mcall (2019, p8), in Sweden learning and play come under the same bracket and practitioners are motivators, mediators and able to identify when support and help is required when supporting the children. Moyles (2010, p205) discusses how being careful in play allows practitioners to encourage development in children, by learning to infuse playfulness into meaningful activities and becoming a play partner within the children’s eyes. McInnes, Howard *et al*, (2013, p6), state to implement this practitioner’s need to be aware of cue’s children have in relation to what they believe play to be. McInnes and Howard *et al* (2013, p6), study showed children were less likely to see a task or activity as play if an adult was present, which made the activity less engaging. Whereas when the practitioner stood back and observed from afar, the children engaged in the tasks and labeled them as play. McInnes and Howard *et al* (2013, p6), also highlighted the importance of practitioners providing environments that are inclusive, stimulating and challenging. McInnes and Howard *et al*, (2013, p6) reinforce how practitioners should engage and interact with the children’s interests, support with open ended questioning which provide children with more control and choice over their learning. McInnes and Howard *et al*, (2013) is also supporting Froebel’s theory, which is the importance of practitioners being trained and knowledgeable in the importance of play and

children's development (Louis, no date, p24). Louis (no date, pg. 24) discusses how we need "holistically educated practitioners" to understanding when to observe from a distance and when to interact with children through invitation of play, in order to help scaffold the individual's overall development successfully. (Bryce-Clegg (2015, pg18-22) further supports McInnes and Howard, by also writing practitioners understanding the children's interests in play and creating open ended tasks, can help create strategies to build children's development through modelling and scaffolding.

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