I confirm that I have not used any AI tools in there search and creation of this assignment. I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated materials as my own work. I confirm that I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

The United Nations Convention on the rights of the child (UNCRC, 2024) states on Article 31 that all children have the right to play and take part in a wide range of different activities and experiences in life.

Brodie (2018) suggests that children learn holistically through choosing what they want to do. This means that children have the opportunity and independence to choose what they want to do. Brodie (2018) believes that play is to promote motivation, willingness, and enthusiasm which are all fundamental factors of holistic learning. Play Scotland (2025) suggests that a child that has that opportunity to play from childhood will help contribute to their well-being in their social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development. Play Scotland (2025) states that play in early childhood has had a big effect on the way a child's brain develops. Furthermore, Play Scotland (2025) suggests that all play in Early Childhood helps the child build strong bones, and muscle strength, they do this by using their physical skills in different ways that with further help them develop skills and coordinated movements. According to Brodie (2024), Mildred Parten's theory of the six stages of play are Unoccupied Play, Solitary Play, Onlooker Play, Parallel Play, Associative Play, and Cooperative Play. Brodie (2024) summarizes Parten's six stages of play as follows. Unoccupied Play which is Birth to 3 months. This is when the child has random movements, beginning to have more control over their body movements. For example, Brodie (2024) says that a baby lying down and kicking their legs and waving their arms in the air develops their physical development. The second stage of play is Solitary Play which is 3 months to 2 and a half years. This is where the child's independence comes into play; they have little interest in associating themselves with other children or adults. In this stage, children are solely focused on play and their own activities and could be completely oblivious to others around them. Onlooker play which is 2 and a half to 3 and a half. Where children are beginning to observe others playing but not wanting to join in yet. They start to develop curiosity and

ask questions about the play. This helps the child's social cues and play behavior. Next is Parallel Play which is 3 and a half to 4. According to Rymanowicz (2015), this is where the child plays alongside others without direct interaction. This shows that the child is beginning to acknowledge others while playing alongside them. Associative Play which is 4 to 5 and a half.

This is where the child is beginning to interact more during play, sharing and talking through what they are playing with or doing. According to Brodie (2024), this helps them start to develop social and communication skills. Lastly is Cooperative Play which is 4 and a half and up. This is where children begin to work together to achieve the same goal; they begin to roleplay with others in different scenarios.

When thinking of types of play, two that happen regularly is Physical play and Imaginary Play (Roleplay). According to Waters-Davies (2022) physical play is beneficial to a child's development and is fundamental to give the child experiences for them to learn and develop in. For example, in my setting physical development is encouraged through P.E sessions, outdoor play and sensory circuits. To support this in practice, it is important to provide equipment for both indoors and outdoor activities such as tyres, blocks, hula hoops, etc. Consistency with the sensory circuits to be able to see the physical development develop. Sprouts (2018) video discusses Piagets theory where they state that children's play environments should change as they develop and grow up. They state that Piaget argues that physical play is essential for a child's cognitive development; this helps the children to be able to understand and explore the physical world. Imaginary play according to Waters-Davies (2022) is an important part of a child's development. Children tend to role-play family members, teachers or job roles. It allows children to explore different characters, which could be through body language, tone of voice, or facial expressions. In my setting, we have a room which is set up for roleplay where the kids can dress up and use loose parts. Sprouts (2020) emphasizes how Vygotsky's theory helps develop communication, understanding, and in some cases self-regulation. Vygotsky argues that Imaginary play helps the child's cognitive, social and emotional growth. It helps them create imaginary settings, imagine different roles, and follow rules.

Part 2 -

In this section it will be discussed what self-directed play is and how us as adults and teaching staff can support the children in that environment. It will be discussed how children can develop different life skills when playing and why self-directed play is important in early years.

Edmentum (2024) states that self-directed play helps children develop different skills such as creativity, social, and problem solving; it helps the children develop curiosity of the world around them. St Andrews (2021) believes that self-directed and child led play helps develop the whole child. They believe that it helps their cognitive skills, emotional and social skills, and their physical skills. St Andrews (2021) states that the children begin to become aware of the world around them, how it works and why it works that way, they learn to take healthy risks, they start to enjoy the thrill of being able to enquire about their creative ideas. Government Wales (2024) states that self-directed play is child-chosen, self-directed and is essential in the Early years. Gov Wales (2024) believes that self-directed play supports the pedagogical principles that have been set out in the new curriculum in Wales. They believe that self-chosen play builds the child's resilience, independence and well-being, supports the child's rights and supports the four purposes within the Curriculum for Wales.

According to the Curriculum for Wales (2025) practitioners who work in Early years are known as enabling adults. They define enabling adults as people who create engaging and inviting experiences that support a child's holistic development, rights, and their well-being. According to the Education Endowment Foundation (2023), adults must set up an enabling environment for the children to want to take part and engage and participate in those activities. Play Wales (2023) states that adults have the responsibility to ensure that children have freedom, space, and the time to play and explore. Play Wales (2023) believes that when adults participate and show interest in children's play, they get more understanding of the child and what their likes and dislikes are, and how the child plays. They explain that children benefit from activities that involve adults, even if it is just there in the background offering low intervention support. Furthermore, Play Wales (2023) discuses that there are several benefits of

play, but those benefits could begin to reduce if adults' control and get involved in their play, as it undermines a child's attempt to be independent, lead and organize their self-directed play. King (2025) discusses how the play cycle and the role of the adult are similar. According to King (2025), the role of the adult when supporting the child in their play is to support them. This is usually offered through low intervention observations, without interrupting their play. The Children's Scrapstore (2013) states that the play cycle is used by professionals such as practitioners and playworkers to help observe and understand play. Practitioners use the play cycle as part of their everyday practice to help understand the children better and to put interventions into play to help better and support it further. According to King and Newstead (2021), the play cycle consists of six different but similar components. Those components are Meta-lude, which is the initial thought or idea; they want to play but not initiate it. Play-cue where the child has intent to play signals and invite friends and teachers. Play return, which is where another child responds to the invite from the other child. The loop and flow are how that play cue is processed. The play frame is where there are rules being established. Lastly Annihilation where the play naturally ends by them going elsewhere or walking away (King and Newstead 2021).

According to the Montessori school of Berkshire (2020), the children's self-directed play is a very important part of their development; it helps build the child as a person. It allows them to develop self-confidence, and to explore the world on their own terms. It allows the child to build their independence by helping them grow and learn in the outside world. To build on this, the raising children's network (2019) states that play is important for a child's learning and development. They state that it supports a child's development through the emotional, social, physical, and cognitive aspects all at once. It allows their brain to build in more ways than one. Montessori (2020) believes that self-directed play allows children to learn at their own pace, with no timeline or pressure, only the child building on their own knowledge and understanding and having the motivation and drive to find things out for themselves.

Part 3 -

In this section, it will be discussed what observations are, how important they are, and what the benefits are with different observation tools and how that observation tool can give an insight into a child's holistic development.

According to Scottish Social Services (no date) observations is about paying attention and looking at the child's gestures, actions, behavior, expressions and listening to their interactions and gestures. They state that observation is in place to listen to the children to discover what the child likes, what they dislike, how they develop, and what they are learning through what the enabling adult puts out for activities and experiences. Birth to 5 matters (2021) states that observations are crucial in early years in order for children to keep developing, and to extend their learning. Birth to 5 matters (2021) believes that good observations start with a positive relationship with the child. Observations should always include the child, parents/carers, and any other professional in the child's life. The Welsh Government (2022) states that the purpose of observations and assessments in the curriculum is to support and ensure that all children learn, develop, and progress to the best of their ability. The Welsh Government (2022) believes that it should initiate to develop a holistic picture of the child, show what their strengths are.

An observation tool which is used commonly in the Early Years foundation is Time tracker. According to Brodie (2017), time tracker observations are where practitioners make observations within every five minutes over a period of an hour. Brodie (2017) continues and explains that time tracker observations should be brief and when the child is engaged in an activity. Brodie (2017) believes that this type of observation tool is beneficial in recording how the child pays, what their likes and dislikes are, how the areas of play are helping them develop. According to Surrey County Council (2025), time tracker observations capture the movement of the child and how long they stay in each area of learning. To build on what Brodie (2017) discussed, Surrey County Council (2025) believes that this type of observation is important as it helps identify the child's needs, interests, and dislikes. They explain how to use the observation tool and how having a floor plan for the indoors and outdoors can be beneficial to identify where the child goes the most in that time frame. Surrey County Council (2025) explains that the practitioner only observes the child for no more than an hour and takes notes where the

child likes to go and how long they stay there for. Furthermore, Gowrie New South Wales (2023) believes that time tracker records also can help to record a pattern of the child's behavior. They believe that this observation tool is an effective way of finding out how children engage with other children, objects, and play areas. The Hawthrone effect can be brought into time tracking and could be one of the limitations. According to Nikolopoulou (2022), the Hawthrone effect is where a child tends to behave differently when they are aware they are being watched/observed. It can affect the time tracking tool as the child could begin to act differently, as they are aware of the practitioner observing them. It can affect the observation on the child, and you will not get the information needed out of it.

According to Is it time to play (2022) there are many benefits of time tracking. They state that it helps and ensures that children are moving through the developmental stages of the curriculum; it takes the pressure off practitioners to remember information about each child. Is it time to play (2022) believes that it helps identify how the child is developing in their key milestones. Spreeuwenberg (2022) believes that Time tracking can help identify additional needs, as it can help identify the triggers for the child's dysregulation which could show in the child's behavior in play, it can also identify how a child regulates, tracks their progress and helps puts plans in place to help and support. According to Birth to 5 matters (2009), time tracking can contribute to the child's holistic development and understanding which would be the child's physical, social and emotional, cognitive and communication skills. Brodie (2018) believes that the holistic development of the child can help show patterns in the child's development. This is where time tracking can help and show different patterns that are emerging.

Part 4 -

Lastly, it will be discussed how observing and assessing children are a vital part of a child's play and how it can give an insight into the child's learning and development. How adults have a vital role in supporting the child in an enabling environment.

According to Pedagogy Hub (2020), when a practitioner/educator is observing and assessing children, it is important for them to have the chance to be able to observe them through play. Pedagogy Hub (2020) states that observing and assessing a child

through play gains knowledge of what the child can do, gains knowledge of their likes and dislikes, and understands where they are at their level of development.
To build on this, Smidt (2015) states that practitioners have a duty to ensure that children are developing and making progress on their educational journey. According to Smidt (2015), observing and assessing a child through play is vital in the early years as it shows more of an accurate reflection of the child and their true capabilities. Furthermore, Smidt (2015) believes that Vygotsky's theory links with observations as he was interested in analyzing and observing how children make progress. He believed that observing them through play shows a child fully engaged; it gives a full insight of what the child can do.

Azilo (2020) states that observations give an important insight on where the children are in their development and how adults can help develop them further. Azilo (2020) believes that observations are a long-term process, where you begin to see positive results over time with the practitioner showing consistency towards the children. Consistency is to ensure that the practitioners are meeting the child's expected stage of development. According to EYWorks (2023) observing children in play shows where they are in their development and what can be worked on. For example, it can be shown that a child is thriving in one area such as problem solving, but when it comes to observing them in another area such as literacy, they struggle with letters. Therefore, it is important for the practitioner to notice these things and give the child opportunities to develop further in the area. EYWorks (2023) believes that observations build strong relationships with children and their families, creating that bond and supporting the inclusive learning environment where the child can thrive.

Birth to 5 matters (no date) believes that adults can support children's play by developing a trusting relationship with the children. This entails the adult being knowledgeable and knowing when to stand back and observe and knowing when to step in and communicate and interact with the child. Birth to 5 matters (no date) states that a knowledgeable adult can support a child's learning and development more effectively than any resources. Edt (2019) states that when an adult knows the child well, and becomes aware of their likes and dislikes, it builds a positive relationship

between one another. The adult will begin to see an improvement in the child's social, physical, emotional, and social skills. Edt (2019) believes that adults need to ensure that opportunities are given for child-initiated and adult-led play. This shows the knowledge of the adult and how to be aware of the enabling environment. The two support the child's development and build the child's confidence in the different areas of learning and in life.

Howard and McInnes (2013) state that children being able to play contribute positively to their well-being and happiness. They believe that an adult's professional development is vital as they must focus on their own understanding and knowledge of play to ensure the adult can recognize how well the learning through play helps the child's development. According to Howard and McInnes (2013) research has found that some practitioners find it difficult to know what they should be doing when children are playing, often taking that step back and supervising or taking the lead and using open rather than closed questions, this allows the children to lead or start up activites with others and make their choice whether they would like to participate in the activity or take a step back. Howard and McInnes (2013) believe that adults see more of a child's development when children feel like they have taken charge of their play. They argue that play shows an important statement when an adult is observing and assessing a child's development and learning. Lastly, Howard and McInnes (2013) emphasise that the role of the adult is important when a child plays, explaining that adults need to ensure that the play is child-led to be able to see the progress in the child's developmental milestones.

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