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Section 1

The Welsh Government Play Policy (2020) signifies the importance of play within the Early Years, the policy guidance defines play as a fundamental part of a child's development. The policy suggests that play should be freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. Play is a significant contribution within a child's wellbeing, the opportunity to play in welcoming environments should be given to a young child, an adult should support the significance of play (Play Wales 2020). Piaget (1920) theory of cognitive development suggests that play is a fundamental part of a child's development, he suggested that within a child's development there are 2 key processes, assimilation (new knowledge and experiences) and accommodation (existing internal patterns and behaviour) which is known as schemas. Piaget (1920) built his theory around 4 stages, stages he believed a child would progress depending on age and getting the appropriate stimuli and environment, all though, it is important to remember because of the assimilation and accommodation process can take time to develop, the duration a child may stay in one stage is controlled by the child's own cognitive development and not that of an adult (Simply Psychology 2020). The benefits of play within the Early Years are crucial to help a child to develop accordingly, allowing a child the right to play (UNCRC no date) in a wide variety of environments with different types of play experiences will help a child understand the true meaning of play, allowing a child the opportunity to play should be given daily (Play Wales 2021). Children learn and gain a variety of valuable life skills and experiences through play which will ultimately develop into necessary adulthood skills, any adult involved within a child's life such as teachers and families should become advocates for the importance of play within Early Years (Irvin, 2017). Among the many different play types, self-directed play is considered one of the most important, self-directed play can either be organised by the child or an adult and often includes adult engagement, but it is completely controlled by the child, similar to free play. In the early school age years self-directed play becomes more language-based, at this age children will begin to imagine and

create their own games, sometimes referred to as self-directed play therefore adults will require less involvement. Adults can support self-directed play by allowing uninterrupted time for the child to learn and explore their own ideas in a safe indoor or outdoor environment, as discussed by Fiechtner and Albrecht (2019) children at this age tend to enjoy having an adult join in with their games, this can be done by listening to the child's cue to join in or just to observe instead, adults must follow the child's lead, by doing this the adult is facilitating self-directed play (Fiechtner, J. and Albrecht, K. 2019). Montessori (2017) theory defines the importance of a child's holistic development through play, the theory emphasizes a child's independence and freedom within limitations, the idea behind holistic approach is for a child to learn whilst playing in a variety of environments which engage within natural environments. Montessori (2017) believed that the main aspect within Early Years should be a natural desire to play. Engaging and allowing the child in different types of play types such as sensory play, imaginative play, motor skills development, speech and communication and literacy will develop a variety of skills among children. Sensory play within childhood can promote and develop a child's creativity and emotion through their senses, it is considered an essential and valuable way to enrich a child's learning through play. Sensory play has many different benefits for a child's development, an example of this would be allowing a child to explore a variety of materials whilst encouraging the child to see, touch, smell, taste and listen to the different sounds and textures such as, sand, wooden toys, glass, smooth/rough, temperature (hot and cold) and food (The Lego Foundation 2018). Goldschmied (1910) recognised the importance of sensory play within Early Years and introduced the treasure basket. The treasure basket is a collection of a variety of materials which include household, natural and recycled objects placed within a sturdy basket and made available for an infant to explore with his or her fingers, hands and mouth, Goldschmied (1910) suggests that this play type is great for a child's interest and brain development (Froebel Trust no date). Each time a child is given the opportunity to explore and discover their senses they are creating new neuronal pathways to their brain while also strengthening pathways that already exist (The Lego Foundation 2018) which supports Goldschmied (1910) who explains how sensory exploration supports holistic development. The Lego Foundation (2018) acknowledge that play is an essential key to a child's learning and development, through play children are learning to explore the world around them, playing allows

children to communicate and develop their social interaction skills while also experience a range of different emotions, allowing a child to play will engage them to practice skills and discover new challenges which often leads to a deeper learning which coincides with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (Simply Psychology 2020).

Section 2

Lavrysen et al (2015) suggests that recent research signifies the benefits of risky play among children, children often naturally tend to test their boundaries within the play environment. Risky play is said to involve an 'acceptable risk' of physical injury, the risks involved in such play should always imply a benefit, an example of this would be a child climbing, the risk to the child climbing needs to be mitigated by the adult in charge therefore while climbing will provide challenge to the child and enable skills such as, building confidence and encourage problem-solving, the adult will have to ensure that the activity is developmentally safe before the activity is carried out (Lavrysen et al 2015). Unfortunately, research proves that outdoor play is becoming non-existent across Europe therefore educational settings are urged to create risk-play opportunities within natural surroundings (Lavrysen et al 2015). The benefits of outdoor play and risky play for a child's learning and development are said to increase physical activity, improve motor skills, problem solving skills and social skills while improving creativity skills and general health (Sandseter et al 2020) an example of this would be 'loose parts play' where children experience a variety of different materials such as crates, tyres, wooden logs and bricks which can be moved around, carried, stacked and lined up (Rodgers 2020). There are many different forms of what is considered as risky play, an example of risky play would be rough and tumble play where children may harm each other through play by wrestling games, chase games or play fighting (Sandseter et al 2020). Rough and Tumble play can enhance children social competencies such as connecting with peer's and the ability to redefine situations, research also suggests that rough and tumble play provides benefits that will become useful in adult life while remaining within a play context such as gaining sufficient skills within aggression, fighting, social competition and gain experience within dominating roles, (Sandseter et al 2020). Rogers (2018) suggests that risky play among children allows children to challenge themselves

physically, emotionally and mentally building up resilience, allowing children the opportunity to problem solve, experiment while practising and learning new skills, while allowing a child to endure risky-play the adult in charge must ensure adequate supervision, remove any unnecessary risk such as glass, and possibly positioning correct equipment such as crash mats, the benefits of doing this may allow the child to expand their skills further such as climbing higher or being able to reach further. Of course, children's safety is paramount, and adults must ensure all health and safety procedures and regulations are being followed correctly while also supporting and encouraging the children which will result in them gaining confidence to try new things and to be able to explore (Sandseter et al 2020). Children aged between 0-3 will usually naturally partake in rough and tumble or risky play with others, at this age children do not intend to harm themselves or one another, in fact this is considered a playful activity for this age (Sandseter et al 2020). Many Early Years settings are uncertain on how to manage this form of play between children and practitioners will often come between children despite the fact fighting acts tend to be simulated, exaggerated, and usually executed between the children themselves (Sandseter et al 2020). Gender differences are shown among recent research, it is said that a father's perspective towards risk play and rough and tumble play is usually positive, fathers tend to engage in more vigorous physical play with their children Sandseter et al 2020). While mothers had difficulty accepting their child opportunities to partake in risk play, mothers were deeply concerned over the child's safety and risk of injury (Sandseter et al 2020). Montessori Academy (2017) explains how the Montessori (1870) learning theory suggests that building resilience within children should be encouraged and to build resilience is an important life lesson. Children will learn and understand how to cope better with life's changes such as a new setting or school, or any changes that occur throughout life once they have built resilience. Montessori (1870) develops resilience by fostering the idea that children are capable learners, who can do and think for themselves. Play Wales (2019) believe that a key finding within children is that play provides a primary behaviour for developing resilience, evidence suggests that playing contributes to resilience by allowing children the opportunity, time, and space to try, learn and overcome new challenges.

Section 3

The Foundation Phase Profile is considered a key part of the Welsh Government's Early Years Development and Assessment Framework (EYDAF) (Welsh Government 2017). The profile is designed to support a child's development throughout the child's Foundation Phase while also supports practitioners through the use of observations and assessments providing an appropriate holistic curriculum for all children. The profile is designed to coincide with assessments performed by health professionals and also supports early identification of possible development delay, special educational needs (SEN) or additional learning needs (ALN) this will ensure that the correct support is given to the child's individual needs. The information collected within the profile will provide support for the child's development and will support any transitions between settings (Welsh Government 2017). The Foundation Phase Profile is made up of two sets of skill ladders which cover 4 areas of learning such as personal and social development, well-being and cultural diversity, language, literacy and communication skills, mathematical development, and physical development. (Welsh Government 2017). The profile consists of four elements -

Handbook - This handbook provides guidance on how to use the profile detailing the skill ladders along with supporting information.

Record Form - This is an optional element to keep record and evidence of a child's development for those who cannot use software-based systems.

Compact Profile Form – This profile allows practitioners to create outcomes for each area of learning, this profile consists of individual snapshots before the baseline assessment.

Full Profile Form – Produces snapshots of the child's development throughout ALL the skill ladders which are within the foundation phase profile, this will allow practitioners to create outcomes aligning with the compact profile (Welsh Government 2017).

Observations within the Foundation Phase is considered a vital key role in everyday practice (Montessori 2020). The purpose of observation is to identify where children are developmentally on the learning continuum and to identify any difficulties or

exceptional ability, by doing this practitioners are able to progress children accordingly (Welsh Government 2017). Through both listening to children and observing children through a range of activities, such as indoor or outdoor play, the practitioner is able to gather enough evidence within different environments, it is important to document observations in a wide variety of environments as children's behaviour and learning differs. By doing this will allow practitioners to build a picture of the whole child (Welsh Government 2017) while also providing information on the child's development allowing the practitioner to support the child's development in the best way possible (The National Strategies Early Years 2009). The benefits of using the Foundation Phase Profile supports effective transition and enables settings to monitor a child's development throughout the foundation phase, while monitoring a child's learning progression it will enable a practitioner to track the child's development and early intervention can be put into place for children needing any additional support. The profile will hold supporting evidence for all assessments carried out and can strengthen the process of transition into Key Stage 2 (Welsh Government 2015). The Foundation Phase Profile was made a statutory requirement from September 2015, the profile has been developed as a national assessment for all children to establish a baseline within the first 6 weeks of Reception Year in school, this is usually children aged 5+ (Welsh Government 2015). It is important within a child's development to develop a good communication channel between practitioners and the child's care givers (Gelfer, 2012) keeping care givers up to date with the child's development is considered an essential part of the Foundation Phase pedagogy (Welsh Government 2017). The Foundation Phase profile supports communicating with the care givers by collecting a wide range of information providing summative judgements on the child's current developmental stage of learning while reporting the individual child's Literacy and Numeracy Framework (Welsh Government 2017). Children may find joining a new setting quite difficult, it is important that the child's needs are considered when carrying out assessments. The profile supports assessments to be carried out throughout a child's foundation phase meaning it can also be used within a nursery setting because the skill ladders of the profile allow assessments of very young children within the very early stages of their development (Welsh Government 2017).

Section 4

Observations are considered the most important aspect within a day-to-day professional practice within settings of children of all ages, by observing a child it will indicate any specific needs the individual may have. Observations are to be carried out on set tasks and spontaneously in a range of different environments (Children first 2015). Unfortunately, a central problem in defining the word 'play' has a lack of agreement on the definition and many definitions have been proposed by category, criteria, and continuum, however each have their limitations and all focus on an adult perspective on the observable act of play (McInnes et al, 2013). It has been suggested that a more valuable approach would be to focus on play from the child's perspective (McInnes et al, 2013). Fawcett and Watson (2016) suggest that observations are a method used by adults to understand children, by listening and respecting the child's interpretations while also valuing the child's imagination through play. While allowing children the right to play and explore within a wide environment, observations and assessments can be carried out (Welsh Government 2015). By doing this will allow the practitioner to create a wider picture or what is said to be a true reflection of the child, monitoring the child's physical actions, expressions, gestures and behaviours while also observing and listening to children while they engage in communication and interaction with other adults or children will show how the child is learning at the developmental stage, by using toys or equipment that has been free chosen can stimulate their development or show the practitioner what support the individual may need in future to gain more skills and knowledge (Sage Publications 2015). Within any Early Years settings observing children's play is a part of the practitioner's responsibility and in line with the EYFS assessment and planning cycle, many practitioners follow a look, listen, and note approach by doing this will enable the practitioner to provide an accurate observation and reflection on any child (Early Years Careers 2021). It is said by McInnes et al (2013) that among recent studies it shows that children's learning performance has significantly improved through the power of play like activities, children who learn through play rather than set non-play type tasks instructed by a practitioner are more focused and motivated towards the task in hand and are more likely to complete tasks such as problem solving more accurately in a play-full manner. The results of research prove the benefits towards play like activities against non-play like activities

in relation to problem solving, meta-cognition and self-regulation while also suggesting that children who learn in this manner and perceiving an activity as play leads to superior developmental because children are experiencing a wide range of behaviours with minimal risk (Howard and McInnes 2012). Research has also recognised the importance of play for children's well-being and development therefore policies have been introduced within the Early Years to ensure adequate play opportunities are in place right across the United Kingdom (Howard and McInnes 2012). It has been demonstrated that children use cues to determine whether or not they perceive an activity as play or not play, the cues tend to be anything from a look to a nod along with many other signal type cues. Children need adults to act as a resource among play such as helping as and when the child needs it by recognising the child's cue. Adults should always remain vigilant when it comes to a child's play it is said by Play Wales (2013) that adults often effect children's play by regulating the time they have to play or providing or denying materials. Play Wales (2013) strongly suggests that practitioners must provide the time and space for children to play while listening to the children and value any contributions they make during play. Children's play is essential for the development and well-being of a child, adults must support play opportunities whenever possible, provide space and time for children to play freely and listen for children's cues for involvement (Play Wales 2013).

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