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AI: No AI used

Section 1 – Evidence of a clear understanding of the importance of a variety of play types. The significance of holistic play should be considered.

Cohen (2018) describes play as a learning experience and a crucial factor of childhood development because it enables children to mimic the behaviours of those around them and to develop their social skills. Cohen (2018) also suggested that it is important that caregivers understand that there are different types of play and what these types are. It will allow them to support children's holistic development better.

One play type which is commonly seen in the early years is 'Social Play'. The Genius of Play (2025) discusses that social play takes place when children are playing with another individual, which becomes more common and complex the older they get. Social play is also highlighted as a valuable type of play in the early years as the children learn social skills such as communication, cooperation, problem solving and perspective talking. These valuable skills that are learnt have shown to help a child succeed in education and in later life. Play Scotland (2025) also mentions the social engagement and interaction which is explored during social play, which could involve children playing a game together, building a game together or creating something together. One example of social play and social development programme is 'LEGO-Based Therapy'. LEGO Therapy is a collaborative play based social intervention which is designed to improve social skills and interaction, mainly focussing on children with additional learning needs, however it is also used for children with social communication or language difficulties. LEGO Therapy takes place in groups of 3 children and one adult. Each child has a specific role within the session and the children are encouraged to build together in their own set roles (Oxford Health National Health Service[NHS] Foundation, 2020). LEGO Therapy sessions promote social interaction, turn-taking, sharing, the learning of concepts and collaborative problem-solving. This type of play can be used to set goals for individual children such as motor skills, language and social skills. By using a tool like LEGO, it engages the child to demonstrate their own skills in social situations and also provides a positive opportunity for guided social problem solving, which helps to develop their social skills that can be used in other situations later in life (Seath, 2025). Social play using LEGO Therapy would come under cooperative play which is number six in Parten's Stages of Play. Cooperative play is organised activities with

shared goals and children are often assigned roles. This type of play usually takes place with children from the age of 4 and a half years and up (Brodie, 2024).

Another type of play which is important and also commonly seen in the early years is 'Physical Play'. Care Learning (2024) describes physical play as any activity that gets children moving which can occur indoors or outdoors. Examples of physical play activities which are seen in the early years are throwing and catching a ball, running, dancing and climbing. Siren Films (2024) highlights the benefits of physical play in early years, which are the improvements on children's physical health and fitness due to these activities keeping children active. Care Learning (2024) also highlights many benefits of physical play on children in the early years. It is suggested that children engaging in physical play enables them to maintain a healthy weight, strengthen their muscles and bones and improve cardiovascular health, which fosters a lifelong habit of staying active. Through physical play, children also have the opportunity to build on their gross motor skills such as balance and coordination through activities such as jumping or climbing. Physical play will also promote the development of social skills in children within the early years. When playing physically in groups, children have the opportunity to learn to take turns, share and follow rules. Activities which are seen as team sorts will help to build cooperation and communication skills within children, this is essential for social development. Physical play could fit into stages two to 6 of Parten's stages of play as physical play tends to start in children aged 6 months and up (Brodie, 2024). At around the age of 6 months old, children tend to start taking part in 'tummy time' which helps the child to strengthen their muscles and start to roll (BBC, 2025).

As explored above, both social play and physical play, play a vital part in children's holistic development within the early years. It is clear to see that social play promotes the social interaction that children need to develop holistically, however the social interaction is also available through physical play. LEGO therapy is shown to help further develop a child's motor skills by the children having to pick up and build with the Lego pieces. Similarly physical play promotes the development of motor skills through activities such as jumping and climbing. On the other hand, LEGO Therapy might not always be work if the individual children are not interested in participating in play which involves using LEGO. However, in all childcare settings in Wales, it is recommended by the Welsh Government that there are 120 minutes per

week which is allocated for physical education. This means that children have to engage in physical activity which then coincides with physical play and its benefits on the children within the early years (National Assembly for Wales, 2019).

Section 2 – 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.

There are many different views on what self-directed play is. Macdonald (2022, p.6) was unable to define play as it can be seen as many different things. However, when looking at self-directed play, it is seen to be play that is instigated by the child itself, which is fun, risky and allows the child to explore their surrounds. For play to be completely self-directed it needs to be what the child chooses without any adult interference. Ledendecker (2020) also describes self-directed play as play that is freely chosen, child led and has no specific goal. This type of play allows children freedom to follow their interests and explore different ideas. Wales is a 'play friendly county' which means that children must be given the opportunity to learn through play in education settings, as it is recognised that children are born with a desire to seek out opportunities and take risks, which is an important part of play and learning. Wales as a country supports self-led play, as this supports a child being able to be curious and take risks independently, resulting in positive holistic development (Play Wales, 2022). Similarly in New Zealand, play is extremely important in the early years. As discussed by Play Aotearoa (2023), positive play improves emotional, social, cognitive and physical development, which helps children to build confidence and relationship building skills which are needed to help progress further in life. They also describe free play as the type of play which is unstructured and promotes freedom of choice within their own play, allowing children to use their own experiences and skills to take charge of their play time. Self-directed play does benefits to children. Ledendecker (2020) discussed how self-directed play helps to build a child's confidence because when they are able to explore on their own, they are able to realise how much they can do by themselves. It was also discussed that self-directed play allows children to work at their own pace, due to there being no timeline and having no academic deadline to meet. The Steiner Connection (2025) emphasises the important of self-directed play within the early years as it allows the children to take control of their learning, creativity and problem-solving skills, and also fosters a sense of independence for the children.

Even though self-directed play is child-led and should have no real adult interference, adults do play a role in self-directed play. Andrews (2017) highlighted that adults must support self-directed play by providing the children with the space

and resources to engage in play, for example ensuring that the space that they are in is able to facilitate self-directed play. Play Wales (2022) recognises that all children should have opportunities to experience or create uncertainty and risk-taking during their play, however regardless of this, children should never be put in an environment which is dangerous and can cause them serious harm. My Teaching Cupboard (2025) highlights Vygotsky's scaffolding theory which relates to self-directed play as the role of the adult during this play is to be able to provide children with the ideas, environments and materials in order for them to participate in self-directed play. This will then help to develop their understanding and promote holistic development within the early years. Another way in which adults can help facilitate self-directed play is by providing the children with open-ended toys. The Steiner Collection (2025) discusses the importance of open-ended toys such as natural materials like wooden blocks or rings, because it allows children to develop their imagination and explore through play. Open-ended toys have the ability to be anything and do anything, they can also change at any time during play. On the other hand, The Steiner Collection (2025) highlights how children should not have too many open-ended toys and that children should be provided with a carefully selected variety of toys in order to achieve better play outcomes.

It is important that every adult who is working within the early years is aware of the six stages within the play cycle. The six stages are metaludes, play cues, return, frames, flow and annihilation (Swansea University, 2023). Play cues are important when observing children who are participating in self-led play because if they are not managed correctly, it can result in adults spoiling the children's play. Sands (2013) highlights the play cues that adults might receive, they could be verbal, where the child will verbally ask them to join in. Adults can sometimes tell that children are using their body language to alert the adult that they would like them to be apart of their play. However, Sands (2013) also discusses how adults break the play cycle because they are trying to improve the play and take control of the play. This then results in the play being ruined and no longer is self-directed play, because the play is no longer child led and freely chosen. It is also discussed that adults might be trying to relay information to the children in order to educate them on specific things, however if there is no play cue from the child and the adult immediately steps in, it still breaks the play cycle and there it is no longer self-directed play.

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

Formative assessment sometimes referred to as observations, is key in teaching young children, focussing on observing, assessing and planning to support their development. It involves observing children during activities to understand their growth and learning needs. This ongoing process helps practitioners make informed decisions and plan next steps to support and extend the child's learning. Its often done informally but sometimes will be documented (BirthTo5Matters, 2025). There are a number of different observational techniques that can be used in order to achieve this. However, before beginning any observation, it is important that the individual who is carrying out this observation considers the reasons for the observation so that they can focus mainly on the specific area of interest (TeachEarlyYears, 2025). The Welsh Government (2008) also discussed how observations are key in informing practitioners and caregivers of children's achievements and identifying next steps for their learning. Gowrie New South Wales [NSW] (2025) highlighted the importance of observations on children in the early years with stating the benefits including planning for and designing a child-centred curriculum, ensuring teaching strategies support the child to achieve personal goals and providing feedback to parents about their child's learning experience. It is important that practitioners within the early years understand that there is no 'right' way to observe children, different observation techniques work for different activities, settings and children. Dewey (1938) cited in Gowrie NSW (2025) discussed how we have to understand the significance of what it is children are seeing, touching and hearing, not just observing them do it.

One observation technique which is used in practice within the early years is photographic and video observations. This type of observation allows practitioners to capture visual evidence of various activities in which the children engage in but also allows the practitioner to record who is not engaged during these activities, and in between different activities. One benefit of using this technique is that it can be quickly done and allows the practitioner who is carrying out the observation to revisit the video/photographic evidence to make a further analysis of what is being observed. Another benefit of using this method would be that it can collect information on people's comments, expressions and behaviour, especially with

children who struggle with verbal communications (University of Plymouth, 2025). Therefore, this observation technique could be used to observe children of all needs. Gowrie NSW (2025) also supported the idea of video and photographic observations by suggesting that these observations can capture how a child learns best through experiences and provides an understanding of children's development. It is also said that a collection of photographs can portray the development of the child, or changes in their skills and play over time.

However, there are limitations that have been discussed regarding video and photographic observations. Flewitt and Cowan (2019) discussed that during a research task to explore the challenges surrounding video and photographic observations, it was seen that the presence of an iPad during children's play and activities caused an interference with the children's engagement. This caused a worry for parents that their children will become distracted during times where they should be engaged in activities and play. It was also mentioned that this type of observation would not always be suitable for practitioners as they found that this observation method can be time consuming resulting in it being ineffective. It was found that practitioners are not always given the time to revisit the video/photographic evidence and make the appropriate notes and reflect on what is it they have actually observed.

Flewitt and Cowan (2019) highlighted how video and photographic observations gives practitioners the opportunity to collect appropriate data which assesses a child's holistic development. It was seen that videos are able to record how physically able a child is by recording them engaging in running, dancing and jumping, socially a child is able to be recorded in situations where they are expected to interact with other children. It was also seen that practitioners take photos of work that that the children are doing to record their intellectual ability.

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

Within the early years, practitioners/caregivers are constantly observing children and building an understanding of their likes, dislikes, levels of development and areas for improvement. Smidt (2015) discusses how observing children carefully and thoughtfully gives practitioners/caregivers an insight into a child's development and preferred way of learning, in order for them to be able to adapt their practise to cater for the needs of the children. Similarly, Drummond (1998) suggests that practitioners/caregivers are able to get a deeper understanding into children's learning, thinking and questioning through observations. It has been seen that typically practitioners/caregivers make assessments and judgements based on their own values and principles, however this can cause a negative effect on the care that is provided holistically. It could mean that children get stereotyped and therefore do not receive the care that they need, this is why it is crucial that all practitioners/caregivers have the knowledge and understanding needed to make beneficial observations, within the early years (Smidt, 2015).

It can be argued that observing children through play allows practitioners to clearly see how children learn and what stage of development they are at. Moyles (2009) suggests that play is the most natural way children learn, and this is why it is important every child has opportunities to engage in play and playful experiences, as it deepens a child's learning and understanding by allowing them to learn from first hand experiences based on what they can already do and what they already know.

During play, it is important that practitioners/caregivers are able to communicate with children correctly and effectively. Howard and McInnes (2013) highlight the importance of adults being able to communicate verbally and non-verbally with children. When a child is playing, they might portray verbal and non-verbal cues to show their thoughts and feelings, therefore it is important that the adults are aware of these cues in order to react to them. Landreth (2012) also emphasises that adults must be able to 'hear non-verbal expression' in order for them to engage in meaningful communication. As discussed above, Play Wales (2022) recognises that children must have the opportunities to engage in challenge and risky play, it is also

important that children are safe doing so. Howard and McInnes also agree that children need the opportunity to engage in challenge and risky play. However, it is suggested that practitioners/caregivers must be careful not to restrict the opportunities children have by becoming overly cautious. It is recognised that practitioners/caregivers must provide children with a play friendly environment, however it is just as important to ensure that children are provided with the correct materials within this environment. Howard and McInnes (2013) recognise the natural play method of 'Treasure Baskets' as suggested by Goldschmied and Jackson (1994). These 'Treasure Baskets contain natural materials like blocks and cardboard boxes, these materials invite sensory exploration and open-ended play to children.

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