Section 1

Play is one of the most important ways in which young children gain knowledge and skills of the world (Lopez, 2018). Play should be a physical or mental activity that is done without any other purpose in mind other than to enjoy and have fun (Twinkl). Susan Mackay believes learning through play is about giving the child continuity and bringing together children's spheres in life including home, school and the wider world (Jennifer, m, Zosh. *Et al.* (2017). Allowing children to have free play studies indicate that it has a great impact on a child's overall health and well-being (Sandborn, 2014). Play is a natural way for children to be happy and active. Play allows the child to develop so many new skills and allows them to build relationships with others. Whilst so many believe that unstructured play has benefits to the children there are still some who believe there are disadvantages of unstructured play as some state it may not lead to learning, guided play maybe more appropriate and that parents may not see or agree with play.

Amelia (2018) describes messy play as an important part of a child's development. It provides children with an experience that motivates their curiosity. Perry, Hogan, and Marlin (2000) suggest that the sensory experiences of early childhood determine the foundation and capabilities of the child's brain development. According to Piaget's theory of development. In childhood there are two stages the sensorimotor stage and preoperational stage in both stages Piaget believes that play through exploring and experimenting are crucial for any child's development. The sensorimotor stage in Piaget's theory of development which are children from birth to two is about the child using their senses to explore. Messy play allows the child to explore (Greutman, H. 2018). Children learn best when they are left to actively engage in the environment and use their senses. Play and exploring is open ended and it allows the children to learn from their own mistakes, messy play helps to develop lots of new skills in a child's Physical, creative, language, social, emotional and mathematical development (project play therapy, 2021). Messy play encourages the children to freely explore different textures allowing them to refine their fine motor skills by using their muscles in their fingers, thumbs, hands when making small movements as they explore and become curious of what they are touching (Amelia 2018). As an adult supporting messy play you should allow the child to explore in their own time and not force them into touching anything they do not want to. The child should be the one who controls the level of contact and stop when they want to (children and family health Devon, No date).

Sue Robb (2019) says adventurous play also known as risky play builds a child's confidence and sense of their own belief and their own capabilities of decision making. There are six categories in adventurous play which include

playing with heights, playing with high speed, using harmful tools, rough and tumble play and lastly where a child may get lost or disappear. Children naturally seek to engage in risk taking and test their own boundaries. Adventurous play is unstructured play that involves the children to take risks. It supports the children into developing and growing their understanding of their own abilities Wiley, 2018). Adventurous play is a critical part of a child's development. Weale, (2022) suggests that after research was carried out children who spend more time engaging in adventurous play have fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety. Adventurous play is child-led which the child will experience different feelings such as thrill, excitement and fear. Experiencing these feelings in childhood will allow children later in life when dealing with these emotions and anxiety that may be caused (Dodd, 2021). The benefits of adventurous play are countless. Adventurous play develops independence, it develops body control and coordination, it allows the child to problem solve and think for their selves (Wiley, 2018). By allowing the children to engage in adventurous play you are creating opportunities for the children to become confident and capable leaners, as the new curriculum for Wales (2020) states the key is for all children in education to become Ambitious and capable, healthy and confident, enterprising and creative and ethically informed citizens. As an early year practitioner, you should ensure you are providing opportunities for adventurous play but always remembering each child develops in different stages. Whilst providing opportunities for adventurous play always remember you must meet the needs of each individual.

Section 2

Self-directed play is also known as real play, this means that the play is led and organised by the child itself. It allows the child to entertain themselves and develop their creativity and imagination (Peng, 2018). As Humphrey, (2020) suggests self-directed play is open ended and only happens when a child plays completely of their own accord. Self-directed play important and crucial and allows the child to work through different concepts at a pace that meets their own developmental needs. (Toy ideas, No date). Play is considered a process that develops within a cycle. Tom (2022) tells us about the play cycle created by Gordan Sturrock and Perry Else in 1998. The play cycle has six main stages and gives the practitioner a much better understanding of ways to which practitioners can support play. The play cycle describes how a child thinks about play when it is being watched. As professionals, we may react appropriately throughout the cycle to improve the child's experience. Using the play cycle framework allows for better support and understanding (King and Newstead, 2019). The play cycle consists of pre cues, this is the child's idea in their head

that will start the play cycle process. Next there is the play cues these are where the child is interested or invited to something in the environment. A play cue can often be in looks, body language, gestures or a verbal invite. Following on from the play que is the play return this is where another child or adult respond to the play cue. After the response forms the flow cycle where the child/children are engrossed in the play. This then develops the play frame. A play frame is developed by the child either physically or mentally. This frame should continue until the play comes to a natural finish. This is the last part of the play called play annihilation this should be initiated by the child who began the cycle. (King and Newstead, 2020). As the United Nations on the rights of the child (2004) states every child has the right to play, this is expressed in article 31 of the rights of the children. Thinking about this article the Welsh Government created a play policy for Wales and in the policy, it is stated that play is an important of children's physical, emotional, social and creative development. (Welsh Government, 2014). As well as developing their physical, emotional, social and creative skills play allows the child to make a sense of the world that surrounds them. Berg, (2021) writes that Montessori believes that child-led play puts the child at the centre of their learning and that they can choose their own activities and make their own choices to build and develop their own confidence and self-esteem. Alongside this, curriculum guidance across the UK states that effective practice should be delivered through play (Department for Education and Skills, (2007). Although early years practitioners agree with this many admit not to having the knowledge and understanding to support self-directed play (Mcinnes, *et al.* (2011). The role of the early years practitioner when supporting self-directed play is to plan the environment thinking carefully about the children and their individual needs. Montessori believes there are six principles to planning an environment for play. They are Freedom, structure, nature and reality, social and intellectual environment. (Montessori for today). The environment needs to be carefully planned out, challenging and giving the child the chance of freedom. (Rymanowicz, (2015). As well as the environment the early years practitioner needs to support self-directed play by talking to the child and engage but only when the child leads you to by doing this the child learns that the adult is invested in them and respect their play decisions and shows the child that you value what they are doing. University extension, (2015). According to Howard and McInnes (2012) The difference in the emotional well-being demonstrated when a child participates in play versus when the child engages in a not like play activity is higher, which has a substantial impact on how a child sees play. Play-based interventions, such as play therapy, can help children who have experienced play deprivation catch up on their developmental delays. Through connections that are facilitated by play therapy, children can express their needs or resolve conflicts in a way that is

compatible with their cognitive development. Play therapy can also help a child learn how to play by giving them the skills and assurance they need to form their own play preferences and eventually engage in unstructured play with self-assurance. (Gaikwad 2015).

Section 3

Observations for children in an early years setting are part of every day practice within Wales using the foundation phase framework. Children are observed to determine where they are in their learning and development, allowing for planning of progression and the identification of any exceptional abilities or requirements. By using the foundation phase profile, the development of children can be monitored, and early interventions can be made for those who require more help or practice with specific abilities. Children may learn and act differently depending on the environment (Welsh Government 2017). The Welsh Government (2017) states that rather than concentrating on getting the child to achieve a particular outcome because this is an individual process that will vary with each child, teachers compare children's achievements with the skills outlined in the Foundation Phase curriculum and consider how to help them advance in their development. Instead of identifying a single aim and delivering activities to achieve that result, working in this manner will allow practitioners to plan to improve the child's skills and support them in acquiring specific skills throughout a broad and balanced curriculum.

The foundation phase profile supports assessments of each individual child’s development throughout their time in Foundation phase. The profile has been designed and developed as a national assessment for all the children. The assessment establishes a baseline for each individual within the first six weeks of reception. (Welsh Government, 2017). The assessment assesses the children’s abilities and developments in the four areas of learning which are, Personal and Social development, Language, Literacy and Communication skills, Mathematical development and Physical development. The foundation phase profile consists of two skills through observation and formative assessments. The Welsh Government's National Data Collection requires that the setting report the results of these Areas of Learning. (Welsh Government no date). Using the foundation phase profile, the development of children can be monitored, and early interventions can be made for those who require more help or practice with specific abilities. These observations can aid in communication with other agencies so that the child can receive the right kind of support (PACEY 2016).

By giving parents/carers detailed information on their child's growth and suggestions for how to support it, the information obtained from the profile will facilitate practitioner's conversations with parents and carers. The information that's collected from the profiles will also support data and will provide evidence for end of phase assessment. While play is crucial for learning and development, there are advantages and disadvantages to the observations that are made. For example, McInnes et al. (2013) found that children who approach an activity where an adult is actively involved do not perceive this experience as play. One of the advantages of the foundation phase profile is that it has been designed so it lines up with the assessments that health professionals carry out. The profile will provide practical information for all involved in the child's development and learning. Welsh Government, (2017). Interactions between adults have the potential to break up a child's play cycle and further alter the cues that shape the child's play. If a child is participating in an activity that they dislike or do not consider to be play when you are watching them, you might not be able to see how skilled they are. The child may not interact as well as they would if they enjoyed the activity According to Bottrill (2018), children who engage in tasks that are not seen as play will be eager to finish the work in order to find something they would like to do, which results in them frequently saying, "Can I go play now?" A child who feels this way cannot be accurately assessed just on observation.

Section 4

A child can act more freely and organically while they are playing rather than when they are engaged in a structured task, where they may not be interested or when the presence of an adult may limit their ability to interact freely. Observing and assessing children in play is a successful way to develop an understanding of the children's learning development. You can evaluate a child's behaviour by seeing them at play as they interact with the environment, resources, and other Children. Children can process challenges they have encountered throughout the day by acting them out in play. Children are able to differentiate between play and non-play, therefore it may be helpful to observe children in the environment while paying attention to how they define play (Howard, J and McInnes, K. 2012). Welsh Government, (2015) explains that observations play a vital role in the daily practice of early years and the main aim for observing and assessing children is to conclude the best way to progress the individual to the next stage and to highlight any difficulties or outstanding

abilities. By observing through play, you can understand the child’s interests and their likes and dislikes. Observations should take place on a regular basis. (Early years matters, 2023). Observations give you a clear understanding of the child as an individual. As Louis, (2020) believes early years practitioners should watch and observe children in play to build a greater understanding of the child’s needs and strengths as an individual. A practitioner who has been routinely observing the child may notice any changes that would indicate the youngster needs assistance in order to digest experiences they may have throughout the play (Earlyyearscareers 2016). The foundation phase profile, (2017) emphasis that observation plays a key role of everyday practice in the foundation phase. Observations need to be carried out both indoor and outdoor for the practitioner to build a bigger picture of the child. Smidt (2015) contends that, when taking into account the full cycle of children and how they learn and develop, observation can be a useful tool for understanding children and facilitating planning for their development. Observing play allows the practitioner to collect important information about the child. Since the child has chosen to play, they will be more calm, and they will play in their own way, watching a child who is given unrestricted access to the activity without adult interference will yield more accurate results. While a child who was invited to an activity by an adult would be reluctant to participate and perceive it as not play because they weren't the ones to decide to do it, and because the activity was led by the adult, altering the potential play experience (McInnes et al. 2013). Children learn about their surroundings through play, according to Llandreth G. (2012). By studying the child's interactions during play, professionals might spot areas where the child could require more assistance. Llandreth G. (2002) analyses Piaget's theory, according to which children can deal with their experiences in the adult-run world and understand them either directly or indirectly through play, which links concrete experience with abstract thought. Children can construct and explore their views about the world through play. A child can construct and explore their views about the world through play. Play can be utilised as therapy to assist a child with several issues when monitoring them and determining that they need additional support. The child may be able to express issues they are having but are unable to express verbally through play therapy. A child who has suffered trauma can benefit from play by being given the time, resources, and space to go past the trauma. Children are continually observed during play therapy to look for signs of improvement, gestures that indicate they need a different approach, or what is going well. This information is then communicated to all adults involved in the child's care so that they can provide the child with the best care possible. G. Landreth (2012).