

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work.

I confirm that I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide as evidence.

Title: children's play: theory and play

Section 1- page 3

Section 2- page 5

Section 3- page 7

Section 4-page 8

Reference list -page 11

Section 1

According to play Wales chwarae cymru (2023) Play is defined as a behaviour that the child has chosen, how they are doing it and why they are doing it. There should be no goals or rewards. Play Wales (2023) also states that a child's behaviour is regarded as play when there is evidence of a certain criteria for example play should be spontaneous and child led. Macdonald (2022, cited in Waters-Davies, 2022) agrees that play is defined as a behaviour and that play should be child led.

The Welsh Assembly Government (2002) states that play is a part of an education method that humans have developed over time. Children have a natural instinct to play behaviour, this has made a big contribution to evolution and survival development. When children play in a natural environment, they learn about the environment and the world around them. Children's play includes their behaviours. This is freely chosen, motivated and directed by the individual. This is important as it is a part of the child's healthy development(The Welsh assembly government, 2002). Welsh assembly (2002) also suggests that play enhances children's holistic development. According the Unicef (2024) every child has the essential need for play in their lives. This is in article 31 of the UNCRC. Waters- Davies (2002, p8) agrees that play is an integral part of children's learning and development. Children have an urge to understand and explore their surroundings. When children play, they are able to take control, discover their individual limits and this provides them with a sense of freedom. Harvard university (2021, cited in Waters-Davies) and play Wales (2023) also suggest that play has an impact on brain development, Huttenlocher (1992, p63, cited in Waters- Davies, 2022) suggests that children ages ten and below have bigger brains than children older than them. This period of time is an important time frame for brain development. Within this age group, a child's life is play dominated. Pound (2007, p74) suggests that both Piaget and Vygotsky's theories show links to play and the development of the brain. Pound (2007, pp40-41) shows links to Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development within play. Vygotsky theorised that his theory showed how children learn through scaffolding. Vygotsky stated that children should be given instructions to follow in order to develop. However, Piaget believed that children should learn at their own pace. According to teach early years (2025) Vygotsky theorised that children's development was impacted by play greatly; he did this by placing value on play

within education. Vygotsky recognised that the child's environment has an impact on the child's learning this includes play opportunities.

According to Cohen (2018) it is vital to understand diverse play types to ensure that practitioners are able to support the holistic development of children. Rees-Edwards (2022, pp 26-28, cited in Waters-Davies, 2022) suggests there are many types of play. Two of the play types mentioned are exploratory play and creative play.

Rees-Edwards (2022, p30, cited in Waters-Davies, 2022) states that creative play is related to art and craft-based activities. However, they suggest that provided the child has the chance to explore and fulfil their curiosity needs can also enhance a child's creativity. Through creative play, it is suggested that children learn to problem solveing therefore enhancing their creativity by enhancing their imagination and giving them ideas. This can enable the child to develop self esteem and self-confidence. Rees-Edwards (2022, p30, cited in Waters-Davies,2022) suggests that giving children the time to explore and find their own answers enhances their cognitive development. Similarly, play matters (2025) suggests that creative play is a sort of play that enables children to explore, use their imagination, try new things and express themselves. Creative play should be child led and freely chosen. According to play matters (2025) creative play is open ended and unstructured, this enables children the freedom to express themselves and to develop their own ideas.

According to play matters (2025) adults should let children lead their play. This will enhance the children's confidence and self esteem.

Trodd (2016) suggests that creative play can be supported by nurturing and enhancing the child's development. They also suggest that staff must be experienced in order to not unintentionally diminish instead of encompass the value the skill of this in young children. This can be done through providing enabling environments so that they are confident to take risks (Trodd, 2026). Department for Education (2022) states that creative play helps children develop holistically, this is because it enhances the child's physical development through using fine motor skills as well as enhancing the child's social and emotional skills through language, imaginative play and communication.

According to NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (2017) exploratory play is defined as when children play using all of their senses such as touch, sight, hearing, touch

and movement to learn about their environment. When children participate in exploratory play they may be taking part in water, and or messy play. Play Wales (2018) suggests that there are many benefits of exploratory play such as building skills through investigating and experimenting therefore feeding the child's curiosity.

Play Wales (2017) suggests that when children take part in exploratory play they use their natural curiosity that drives their desire to learn through having hands on experiences. TLC Essex (2025) states that exploratory play can be supported through providing children with a vast range of every day resources. This can impact on the child's language development. This will also provide richer prospects for children to develop their vocabulary while also developing their fine motor skills. Queen Margaret University (2023) suggests that exploratory play can be linked to holistic play as it can help develop the child's holistic development. Kids clinic (n.d) suggests that exploratory play can also be linked to the first stage: unoccupied play as it can provide sensory play and help with early motor skills. However, Pathways (2019) suggests that exploratory play could cover all of the stages of play throughout the child's journey.

Section 2

Play adventures (2019) suggests that self-directed play is simply defined by letting children investigate their environment. When play is child led there would be no framework or adult interference. The play should be completely the child's own. Play Wales (2018) and play adventures (2019) agree that play should be child led, and children should have the freedom of choice. This may include what they play with and when. They also agree that children should have their own interests and ideas and be able to play to enhance these.

Edmentum (2024) states that self directed play is important because it nurtures curiosity and enhances creativity. Edmentum (2024) also suggests that when children take part in self directed play they are provided with the opportunity to explore their environment and the world around them. When children are allowed to have self directed play they master skills such as problem solving and social skills.

According to Thomas (2023) Mildred Parton theorised that there are six stages to play. this theory was inspired by Piaget and Vygotsky's theories. Although Mildred Parton's theory was based on play and social relationships. Thomas (2023) states

that the six stages of play are unoccupied behaviour, onlooker, solidarity independent play, parallel activity, associative play and Cooperative or organized supplementary play. HSE (2022) suggests that when children engage in solitary play children will play by themselves and explore their surroundings. These children may do this using their senses such as tasting and touching things. HSE (2022) states that when a child engages in parallel play they do not interact, they may even be playing with similar toys. According to Thomas (2023) this links in with solidarity play as these children may appear to be playing together, but in actuality they are not engaging with each other.

KLion (2022) suggests that the play cycle also consists of six stages of play and emphasises the importance of child led play. these are the pre-cue, the play cue, the play return, flow, the play frame and play annihilation. KLion (2022) suggests that the play-cue stage is when a child transferring their ideas into their environment. It can encourage other children to participate in the play. It is also suggested that the play return can take place when a the play cue of a child is noticed by another child and they part take I the play. they also suggest that the flow is the process of play cue and pay returns. When children play and the play develops, it can start more pre-cues and play cues and intern more play returns. The play frame is when there are boundaries within the play, they can be imaginary or physical. KLion (2022) also states that play annihilation happens when a child is occupied in play. they also mention play adulteration, this is when it is the end of the play cycle and an adult that had no part in the initial play takes part. Aminpour, Bishop, and Corkery (2020) states that there is unseen value and links between self directed play and outdoor play.

Play Action International (2021) suggests that there is self directed play can hold great value. When a child is part taking in self directed play they can benefit from first hand experiences and a variety of opportunities to develop. Children have a biological drive to play and will play at any given opportunity. While children self play they have more interest in what they are doing (Play Action Internation, 2021). UNCRC (2006) *article 31* states that adults should ensure that children have to opportunity to engage in play and rest in and environment that is safe, engaging, stimulating and supportive. It also states that children's voices should be heard when planning children's play.

Section 3

Observation is defined by West Sussex county council (2021) as the official term for one of the most significant parts of every day practice when working in the early years. When observing children, practitioners listen to the children whilst watching them take part in various activities. This enables them to learn about the children's individual needs. Observations can be both planned and unplanned.

Birth to five matters (2021) states that formal observations are essential within the early years. Birth to five matters (2021) similarly states that through observing children practitioners gain knowledge of where the child is developmentally and their likes and dislikes. This then enables practitioners to support the child effectively and carry out effective planning .

According to Nutbrown (2011, cited in Bruce, T. Louis, S. and McCall, G. 2014) it is vital to make in depth and sensitive observations. This enable the practitioner to understand the how child plays and what they are doing. This enables the practitioner to support the child and provide appropriate learning opportunities.

West Sussex county council (2021) suggests that if observations are not carried out then when planning would be built on what the practitioner deemed the children need, this may not be correct and therefore not meet the needs of the children.

Learning journals (2025) suggests that the Leuven scale is an observation type that focuses on five different points. These five points enables practitioners to evaluate the child's emotional well-being. This observation method provides an insight into the child's emotional wellbeing and inspires engagement.

There are many advantages and disadvantages to the Leuven scale method of observation. It is suggested that one of the advantages is that the Leuven scale is centred around the child's learning. The Leuven scale is considered to be an effective form of observation as it focused on the child and their social, mental and emotional wellbeing and is not considered universal as each child is unique. Another

advantage of the Leuven scale is that it delivers a practical and uniform for practitioners to gauge the child's development and learning (learning journals, 2025).

One of the disadvantages to the Leuven scale is that it does not consider children that have additional learning needs or disabilities. Children with ALN do not always have the ability to display the behaviours catalogued within the Leuven scale. This can present barriers and limit the observation as the child would not be able to do what is asked of them, therefore giving incomplete or inaccurate information. This can also be the case with children from different cultures and backgrounds, as they present different behaviours (learning journals, 2025).

Siraj-Blatchford and Wong (1999) (cited in Mackinder, 2015) suggests that the Leuven scale is based on the adults' interpretations.

Early Years Staffroom (2017) suggests that the Leuven scale gives insight to the child's holistic development as it focuses on the importance of deep engagement, emotional well-being and holistic development of children, and does not exclusively focus on the child's cognitive and skilled progression.

Section 4

According to Smidt (2015) it is important to observe children with care, this gives the practitioner a greater understanding where the child is developmentally and academically. Through observation adults can also get an insight as to what the child the child is interested in and what they understand. This can also enable the practitioner to enhance the children's learning opportunities and make adaptations where needed. This can be achieved by observation (Smidt, 2015). Gjørde *et al.* (2021) states that it is important that adults ensure they listen to the child's voice in regard to their play, this enables adults to see the benefits of the child-led play and how the play promotes the child's development. According to Drummond (1998) when children are observed the adult gets a better insight into the child's thinking and learning. Artis (2025) suggests that when children engage in play, it is easier to have an insight to their development and their lives. While playing children subconsciously show adults their view of the world around them. According to Smidt (2015) Vygotsky focused on observing and examining the way that children develop.

He noticed that children move from everyday ideas (they discover things when investigating the the real world) to technical ideas while thinking of theories. This could be done while making records or drawing pictures to enable and to enhance their brains to help solve problems.

The association for qualitative research (2024) states that the Hawthorne effect also known as the observer effect is when someone knows they are being observed and therefore adapt their behaviour to suit the narrative. According to Oswald, Sherratt, and Smith (2014) there are ways to conquer the Hawthorne effect while observing children, these are to build a good rapport with the children prior to the observation and establishing positive relationships. When this is done effectively the observer would be able to see the child's true behaviours. Another is to use the participant method of observation, this enables the observer an inside perspective as the children are not so aware they are being observed. This can work effectively when combined with the by stander method as it provides a balanced over view (Oswald, Sherratt and Smith, 2014). McCambridge, Witton, and Elbourne (2014) suggest that if the observer experiences the Hawthorne effect whilst observing, it can create bias and inaccurate conclusions.

Gökce (2020) suggest that there may be some ethical issues when it comes to observing children. They state that it is important to ensure the child's rights are protected during any observations. It is also implied that before undertaking observations it is important to get permission for the children's parents and ensure that the information collected is available to them. Gökce (2020) also states that children should be made aware of what the observer will be doing and ensuring it is age appropriate so that the children understand. According to Palaiologou (2016) (cited in Gökce, 2020) suggests that parents should be informed of any observations and should be able to voice their views and feelings about that observation.

Rodriguez *et al.* (2024) states that observational learning is vital to gain knowledge of new behaviours within educational practice. This can be an essential method to gain insight of the child's social and emotional wellbeing and development. Whalley (2021) suggests that adults should facilitate play and plan the child's environment accordingly. They also suggest that adults do not always need to be a part of

children's play and should stand back. They also suggest that adults should have a greater understanding of development and that every child is unique.

According to Howard and McInnes (2013) when a child sees an activity as play their emotional-wellbeing is heightened. They also suggest that play can be perceived as a cognitive state and therefore an observable behaviour. They also indicate the vitality of training to enable practitioners to have a better understanding of children's opinions in regards to their play and utilize this information to provide stimulating and engaging environments to enhance the children's development through the medium of play.

Reference list

Aminpour, F., Bishop, K. and Corkery, L. (2020). *The hidden value of in-between spaces for children's self-directed play within outdoor school environments*. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 194, p.103683. doi:

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2019.103683>.

Artis. (2025). *The importance of play in education*. Available at:

<https://artisfoundation.org.uk/news/the-importance-of-play-in-education/>. (accessed on:15 July 2025)

Bilton, H., & Crook, A. (2016). *Exploring outdoors ages 3-11 : a guide for schools* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315747774>

Birth to five matters (2021) *observation, assessment and planning*. Available at:

<https://birthto5matters.org.uk/observation-assessment-and-planning/> (accessed on 24 February 2025)

Bruce, T. Louis, S. and McCall, G. (2014) *Observing children* . London; Sage publications limited.

Cohen, D. (2018). *The Development Of Play* (4th ed.). Routledge. Available at:

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315121703>

Department for Education (2022). Help for early years providers : Imagination and creativity. Available at: <https://help-for-early-years-providers.education.gov.uk/areas-of-learning/expressive-arts-and-design/imagination-and-creativity#why-imagination-and-creativity-are-important>. (accessed on: 5 May 2025)

Drummond, M. (1998) 'Observing children', in S. Smidt (ed.), *The Early Years: A Reader* and (2010), *Key Issues in Early Years Education*, 2nd edn of *The Early Years: A Reader*. London and New York: Routledge

Early Years Staffroom. (2017). *Leuven Scales*. Available at:
<https://www.earlyyearsstaffroom.com/eyesresources/leuven-scales-download/>.
(accessed on: 25 June 2025)

Edmentum. (2024). *How Self-Directed Play Helps Your Child Learn*. Available at:
<https://www.edmentum.com/intl/articles/self-directed-play/>. (Accessed on 18 march 2025)

Gjærde, L.K., Hybschmann, J., Dybdal, D., Topperzer, M.K., Schrøder, M.A., Gibson, J.L., Ramchandani, P., Ginsberg, E.I., Ottesen, B., Frandsen, T.L. and Sørensen, J.L. (2021). *Play interventions for paediatric patients in hospital: a scoping review*. *BMJ Open*, 11(7), p.e051957. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2021-051957>.

Gökce, K. (2020). *Observing young children's play: a brief review*. *Gyermeknevelés*, 7(2–3), pp.20–27. doi:<https://doi.org/10.31074/2019232027>.

Howard, J. and McInnes, K. (2013). *The impact of children's perception of an activity as play rather than not play on emotional well-being*. *Child: Care, Health and Development*, 39(5), pp.737–742. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2214.2012.01405.x>.

HSE (2022) *Stages of Play*. HSE.ie. Available at: <https://www2.hse.ie/babies-children/play/stages/> (accessed on 29 April 2025)

kids clinic (n.d.). *Stages of Play Development in Children* | Kids Clinic Singapore. Available at: <https://kidsclinic.sg/pd-guides/health-topics/play-child-plays-0-5-years/>. (accessed on: 15 June 2025)

KLion (2022). *What is the Play Cycle?* | Smartkidz Play and Learn. [online] Smartkidz Play and Learn. Available at: <https://www.smartkidzplayandlearn.co.uk/2022/01/29/what-is-the-play-cycle/>. (accessed on: 29 April 2025)

Learning journals (2025) *What is the Leuven scale and how to use it*. Available at: [https://learningjournals.co.uk/what-is-the-leuven-scale-and-how-to-use-it/#:~:text=The%20Leuven%20scale%20is%20a%205%20point,whilst%20encouraging%20engagement%20for%20the%20learning%20development](https://learningjournals.co.uk/what-is-the-leuven-scale-and-how-to-use-it/#:~:text=The%20Leuven%20scale%20is%20a%205%20point,whilst%20encouraging%20engagement%20for%20the%20learning%20development.). (accessed on: 19 February 2025)

Mackinder, M. (2015). *Footprints in the woods: ‘tracking’ a nursery child through a Forest School session*. Education 3-13, 45(2), pp.176–190. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2015.1069368>.

Montessori school (2024) *Why encourage self directed play*. Available at: <https://www.berkshireremontessori.org/msb-blog/self-directed-play> (accessed on 1 February 2025)

McCambridge, J., Witton, J. and Elbourne, D.R. (2014). *Systematic Review of the Hawthorne effect: New Concepts Are Needed to Study Research Participation Effects*.

Journal of Clinical Epidemiology, 67(3), pp.267–277. Available at:

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3969247/>. (accessed on: 15 July 2025)

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (2017). *Explorative Play*. NHS GGC. Available at:

<https://www.nhsggc.org.uk/kids/life-skills/play-leisure/explorative-play/>. (Accessed on: 28 May 2025)

Oswald, D., Sherratt, F. and Smith, S. (2014). *Handling the Hawthorne effect: the Challenges Surrounding a Participant Observer*. *Review of Social Studies*, 1(1), pp.53–74. doi: <https://doi.org/10.21586/ross0000004>.

Pathways (2019). *The 6 Stages of How Kids Learn to Play | Child Development*.

Pathways.org. Available at: <https://pathways.org/kids-learn-play-6-stages-play-development>. (accessed on 15 June 2025)

Play Action International (2021). *The Importance of Child-Directed Play*. Available at:

<https://playactioninternational.org/the-importance-of-child-directed-play/>. (accessed on:25 June 2025)

Play adventures (2019) *Self directed play*. Available at:

<https://www.playadventures.org/self-directed-play> (accessed on: 1 February 2025)

Play matters (2025) *The role of creative development in early childhood*. Available at:

<https://playmatters.org.au/blog/the-role-of-creative-play-in-childhood-development> (accessed on: 17 February 2025)

Play types (2017) *play types*. Available at: [https://play.wales/wp-](https://play.wales/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/play-types_2023.pdf)

[content/uploads/2023/08/play-types_2023.pdf](https://play.wales/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/play-types_2023.pdf). (accessed on:15 June 2025)

Play Wales (2018) '*Playing and Hanging Out*' available at: <http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/playinghangingout> [Accessed: 23 June 2025].

Play Wales chwarae cymru (2023) *Rationale for a national play policy for Wales*. Available at: <https://play.wales/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Play-Policy-Rationale.pdf> (Accessed on: 30 January 2025)

Pound, L. (2007) *How children learn: from Montessori to Vygotsky – educational theories and approaches made easy*. London; step forward publishing limited.

Queen Margaret University (2023). *Nurturing holistic development in early childhood*. Available at: <https://online.qmu.ac.uk/blogs/nurturing-holistic-development-in-early-childhood/>. (accessed on: 15 June 2025)

Rodriguez, J.M., Eppinger, B., Heekeren, H.R., Crone, E.A. and van Duijvenvoorde A, C, K. (2024). *Observational reinforcement learning in children and young adults*. *npj Science of Learning*, 9(1). doi: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41539-024-00227-9>.

Smidt, S. (2025) *Observing Young Children : The Role of Observation and Assessment in Early Childhood Settings*, Taylor & Francis Group. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/trinity/detail.action?docID=3569303>.

Teach early years (2025) *Vygotskian theory of play – Who is Vygotsky and what is his legacy?*. Available at: <https://www.teachearlyyears.com/nursery-management/view/pioneering-play> (accessed on: 31 January 2025)

The association for qualitative research (2024). *Definition: Hawthorne Effect*. Available at: <https://www.aqr.org.uk/glossary/hawthorne-effect>. (accessed on: 27 June 2025)

Thomas, R. (2023). *Mildred Parten's Six Stages of Play*. Communityplaythings.co.uk. Available at: <https://www.communityplaythings.co.uk/learning-library/articles/mildred-parten-and-her-six-stages-of-play?srsltid=AfmBOor-u56dSHbxclNP6XK> (Accessed on: 29 April 2025).

TLC Essex. (2025). *Exploratory Play*. Available at: <https://www.tlc-essex.info/resource/play-and-language-level-1-exploratory-play/>. (accessed on: 15 June 2025)

Trodd, L. (2016) *The early years handbook: for students and practitioners: an essential guide for the foundation degree and level 4 and 5*. London; Routledge.

UNCRC (2006). *Article 31 - I have a right to relax and play*. The Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland. Available at: <https://www.cypcs.org.uk/rights/uncrc/articles/article-31/>. (accessed on: 25 June 2025)

Unicef. (2016) *Children's Rights*. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/> (accessed 29 January 2025)

Waters-Davies, J. (ed.) (2022) *Introduction to play*. United Kingdom; Sage Publications Ltd.

Welsh Assembly Government (2002) *Welsh Assembly Government's play policy*.

Available at: <https://play.wales/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Play-Policy.pdf> (accessed on: 28 January 2025)

West Sussex county council (2021) *Effective Practice: Observation, Assessment and Planning*. Available at:

https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/media/5555/effective_poa_and_planning.pdf

(accessed on: 19 February 2025)

Whalley, C. (2021). *The role of the adult in learning through play*. [online] early years alliance. Available at: <https://www.eyalliance.org.uk/role-adult-learning-through%C2%A0play>. (accessed on: 15 July 2025)

