

I confirm I have not presented AI generated text and have drafts and evidence of my notes and other resources I used before.

Research throughout this assignment is what have been available to me. Whilst researching through Google Scholar I have had problems with reliable links and information being presented to me.

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Play

The Welsh Government highlights the importance of play during the foundation stage within early years education and state that play gives children and babies the opportunity to learn new skills. The Welsh government was the first country in the world to pass a law to protect children's rights to play promoting a 'Flying start to life' and 'Play Friendly Wales' Children and Families Wales 2010 ensuring the promotion of the United Nations Convention on The Rights of the Child. (UNCRC). The Welsh play policy 2002 sets the foundation for children's play ensuring the emphasis on inclusive and accessible play for all children. Sheridan and Howard (2017) write that through research, preschool children define play as a self-directed activity that they can freely choose. This could suggest that the children would prefer to freelance their play as a pose to structured set activities. Lindon (2001) writes there is no concise definition of play that would cover all features of play when people use the word. She says play includes a range of activities and can be undertaken for the child's own interest and enjoyment. Lindon also says that play activities are not essential to meeting the basic physical survival needs of a child although play is extremely important to support psychological wellbeing, the learning of physical skills and intellectual stimulation whereas UNICEF (2024) state that play is an essential need for every child. Children's commissioner of Wales Sally Holland (2018) says play is what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way, and for their own reasons. She emphasises that play is fun and helps children develop.

Play Wales (2023) indicate the sixteen different types of play that early year's professionals interpret throughout the settings when caring for children. Two types of play that support a child's holistic development are physical play and social play. Physical play includes the parent being physical first during flying start years when they are interacting with playgroup opportunities given to them allowing them to build positive engaging relationships with the child's early years practitioners ensuring the holistic care needs are being met for their child.

Physical play can include many different physical activities from dancing with music to block play and loose part's play. According to Spry (2020) block play allows the children to negotiate between each other which allows the type of play to merge with social play influencing the holistic development of children encouraging communication. Oxford health NHS foundation and Therapy focus (2024) say that through Lego therapy children are able to target goals around social skills, language and motor skills. LeGoff (2000) developed Lego therapy as an activity which is now widely used by early years professionals as social development play programmes for autistic children and other children with social communication difficulties. LeGoff (2000) introduced the idea that children who played with Lego were more likely to interact through collaborative play. Through an example observation where an even amount of Lego was shared around within groups of two and three, they shared their ideas and creativity to create something through the Lego. It was observed that through the Lego therapy the children were able to develop better communication skills including non-verbal communication skills, sharing, learning of concepts, collaboration and social interaction sharing their creativity with each other. Lego therapy is known to have three roles which include, The builder, the engineer and the supplier. LeGoff (2000) proposed that through the children having different roles they were able to work together rather than alone promoting social interaction, collaboration,

collaborative problem solving and turn taking. Spry (2020) says through observation children have built towers and bridges and then compared what they have built with the other children through counting their stacks of blocks, measuring distance's and looking at their bridges. Through this play, children are immediately in promotion of their physical development using their gross motor skills with this in mind, Howard (2017) says that our approach to defining play is based on an adult view of what play looks like rather than taking the child into perspective (Holt et al, 2015). McInnes et al, (2013) maintains that the development of play relies on a child's enjoyment and adults should ensure they understand what the child defines as enjoyment through activity and play. Through the Welsh government (2012) play based curriculum in Wales it is maintained that the early years professionals focus on the individual needs of the child including the holistic development over a one size fits all approach.

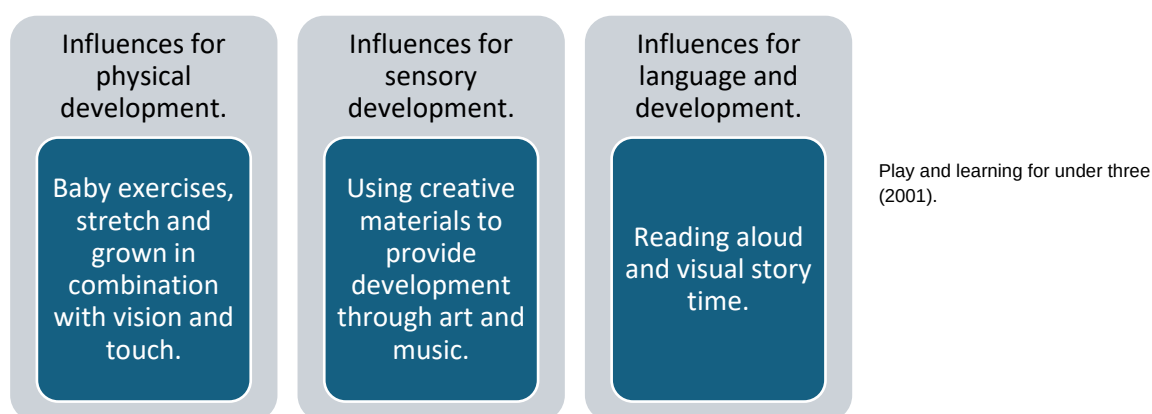
Stages of play

Mildred Parten introduced the theory of the six different stages of play in 1929.

Mildred Parten's six stages of play	
Unoccupied play – Early random movements and observing surroundings helping infants gain bodily control.	Birth – 3 months of age.
Solitary play – Children play alone, developing concentration and independence.	3 months – 2 years of age.
Onlooker Play - Children watch others play and learn social skills through observation.	2 years of age.
Parallel play – Children play side by side with similar toys but without direct interaction. Imitating what is played nearby.	2 years of age and older.
Associative play – Children interact during play without a common goal but sharing materials and talking. The Activities are not organised.	3-5 years of age.
Co-operative play – Children engage in organised activities with shared goals taking on different roles, enhancing social skills.	4+ years of age.

Brodie (2025) explains that through Parten's (1929) stages of play theory she believed that play became gradually more social with age and used throughout the early years it has influenced the classroom designs and observation techniques used. Piaget (1951) proposed that through the exploration of play children can learn to become familiar with objects, toys and their environment.

Howard (2017) play development example	
Unoccupied play –The newborn learns to attract and welcome the attention of primary caregivers usually being their first play mate.	Birth – 3 months of age – Lively interchange involving looking, listening, vocalising and body movements.
Solitary play – With head and back supported the baby can demonstrate hand eye co-ordination through fingers play developing hand eye co-ordination.	3 months – 2 years of age. Developing voluntary hand release being able to hold. Developing the ability to explore their environment to play.
Onlooker Play	2 years of age. Rapid improving control of body and limbs, pushing, pulling, carrying. Discovering control of push and pull toys.



Lindon (2001) pointed out that throughout research and observations within children's learning there has been more interest with Vygotsky's theory approach over Piaget theory. Vygotsky believed that play created a zone of proximal development with a potential for learning whereas Piaget (1951) believed that children could only see a situation from their viewpoint at the time labelling them as 'egocentric' or 'idiosyncratic'. Piaget was interested in the cognitive development of children and how play activities supported their ways of thinking. According to Lindon (2001) he was uninterested in the dynamics of play between children establishing a top-down view of children in contrast to a bottom-up perspective. Vygotsky emphasised that children were active participants in their own play and learning, and through the zone of proximal development the children could be supported to reach higher potential within their development. The Vygotsky approach is a challenge to Piaget's views where he said that the children could not learn until they were ready to in any area. Bruner (1960) another theorist was prominent in including Vygotsky's ideas throughout his theory and further development and developed the 'Spiral Curriculum'. Ireland and Mouthaan (2020) say through Bruner's theory, learning is visualised as a spiral upwards from basic to advanced concepts. They believe that the curriculum could be applied to all subjects including learning through playing and observations. Lindon (2001) maintains the positiveness of Bruner (1960) spiral curriculum and believe the idea that children will revisit play materials and activities over the years but then use them in a different way as their development has progressed.

Why it is important for children to choose their own play and the importance of the role of the adult in children's play.

The Welsh Government (2014) state, play encompasses children's behaviour which is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. Self-directed play is also known as 'open ended play' or 'free play' and involves children playing with no adult directed outcome allowing them to use the toys in their own creative way giving children their right. (Ledendecker 2020).

Ledendecker (2020) says that a child being imaginative with a baby doll or a dinosaur is limited by the nature of the toy as pose to a toilet roll tube which has endless possibilities and can be used as a telescope or a bridge item to guide a ball through. She maintains that the professional early years practitioners must ensure to remember to step back and observe how children discover their own outcomes and creativity allowing them to build self-confidence and knowledge maintaining their holistic development throughout the play. Lindon (2001) supports Bruce (1996), they believed it was important for the early years professionals to play with the child although they must not take over and the child must choose to play and not be made to play. Lindon (2011) believed that if early years practitioners ensure effective planning that benefits the children, providing them with experience's that are developmentally appropriate and fun relying on the early years professionals to use their knowledge of what can make a positive difference to the child's experience through using the learning and play environments they could thrive. (Lindon 2011). According to Henderson (nd) who incorporated Dr Tina Bruce theory 'The twelve features of play' (1991) throughout her early year's education says, self-directed free flow play is important because it offers a play that allows practice to choosing, flexibility and offers an overall positive play learning experience. She maintains that adult led tasks should not be called play but should instigate play situations always continuing to offer opportunities for the children to plan their own activities.

Observations for young children.

Through observing early years educators can practice aligning with the four purposes of The New Curriculum for Wales (2022) built on the progression of learning bringing a purposeful journey to the child. Observing play purposes include: 1. Ambitious, capable learners. 2. Enterprising and creative contributors. 3. Ethical and informed citizens. 4. Healthy confident individuals. Observing play directly supports learning (The Welsh Government, 2024). Sheridan and Howard (2017), point out that there are many ways to undertake child observations including the schedule of growing skills (SOGS) and through doing these, early years carers can gather information to provide the appropriate opportunities and support that will promote and aid the child's healthy development including social, physical and cognitive skills. Sheridan conducted numerous observations using different methods over a time scale and pointed out that through her research when using the running record observations, it was challenging for deciding what to document of the children because it was occurring in the real time meaning decisions had to be made on the spot where as the diary entry was one particular observation and she was able to make notes for going forward. She maintains

that observations should include social interaction skills as well as tracking the overall play level within the play observations scale.

The three main roles of observation and assessment include supporting the child to identify, capture and reflect on the progress using it as a tool to recognise the achievement, focus to progress to the next steps in learning. (Welsh Government 2022).

The cycle of evidence-based practice highlights the importance of observations for ensuring the best quality health, care and developmental support for children, informing theory, policy, law and practice.



Play in early childhood. (2017)

Observation of play: Sand playing.

Various colour bags of sand being opened and mixed throughout the tray. The child appears physically well. Verbally and non-verbally communicating with myself whilst filling up the sandcastle pot and then builds a sandcastle. Other children interact and the child leaves the sand play area.

Notes: Engaged throughout. Absorbed the sand pointing out different colours in the bags. Attention given to wanting to build a strong structure within the pot to allow the castle to stand. Communicated throughout. Sand play stopped once castle was made, and the child asked for more sand play items.

Going forward: Provide more apparatus for making new objects out of sand to allow more creative play as well as enough for other children to play along.

Through this observation early years practitioners are able to make notes and provide a conclusion with how to advance the child's play next time. It is a simple and easy read for the next steps to improving development.

The role of play when undertaking observations and assessments of children.

The Welsh government play laws ensure that the children are asked what activities they would like to play and carry out. Emphasising the importance of this Howard (2017) says that throughout the process of observations carried out by early years professionals they can evidence the developments of the child ensuring through the different observation techniques and tools provided they are meeting the child's overall needs. The Welsh Government (2024), maintain that when early years practitioners are carrying out their observations they are liaising with the parents and able to use the information they observed to make sense of how the child is developing, including their interests and dislikes and plan for future steps for example, It was observed by the child's parent that their child may have an additional learning need and has documented the behaviours presented at home when supporting them at home learning. The parents and early years professional team will then work with each other to support the child and through carrying out further observations they can then ensure if required, that referrals are made to the correct multi-disciplinary teams. Howard (2013) explains the importance of play on a child's emotional wellbeing and following a study which included more than one hundred children it was recorded through the Leuvans Involvement Scale observational technique that there was a huge difference to increased indicators relating to the child's emotional wellbeing. It was recorded that the children were more engaged when the activities were perceived as play rather than not. Howard also highlights the importance for early years practitioners to create playful situations to enhance the potential of developmental play.

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