

Section 1

Play has been the theme of theoretical deliberation throughout history, the value and benefits of play have been discussed and debated where differing points of view have been submitted (Cohen,2006). As a result of this, there are various types of definitions for play, many theorists offer their own individual perception of play including the benefits they offer to child development and learning. Froebel believed that play exemplified development from within the child, however, could be nurtured by adult guidance and the provision of the appropriate materials. Piaget defined play based on criteria, practice play, games with rules and symbolic play whereas Hughes identified sixteen different types of play. There are many types of play, for example physical activity play, this play involves running or exercised based play, you have object play, this includes activities such as lego or block building, then there is language play, playing with noises, words and syllables. Fantasy or pretend play, where children will use their imagination, nonliteral use of objects and role play. These are just a few examples. Role play has three basic features: children manufacture imaginary scenarios, pick their roles acting out play and persistently following rules implied by attributes. Vygotsky deemed the capability to follow the rules as a fundamental key indicator of being equipped for school learning, furthermore the ability to participate in a game with hidden rules that can be altered randomly during play signifies that the child's cognitive, social and verbal skills were adequately developed. Role play not only encourages a child's imagination and creativity it also improves and builds upon their communication skills, extending their vocabulary. Role play is subjective, for example, it can be completely fictional, where the child creates an imaginary scenario/setting, or it can imitate home life or situations that the child has experienced, the child may also display symbolic play, for example, using a banana as a telephone. Role play not only encourages a child's imagination and creativity it also improves and builds upon their communication skills, extending their vocabulary. In addition to this role play enables the children to problem solve or resolve conflicts, allows them to self-regulate and provides opportunities to improve their cognitive skills including numeracy and literacy. Creative play enables the child to play freely, there is no definitive structure, the child can form new relationships with their classmates. In addition to this creative play also allows the child to explore their imagination, explore varying objects and their uses, redefining those objects as they wish in accordance with their ideal. The child may use any equipment they wish thus allowing the possibilities for learning and development endless, for example, they may wish to use building blocks to create a car, not only developing their fine motor skills but also their numeracy skills. Creative play allows the child to express themselves freely. Play is regarded to be primitive to early years development and education. It is considered to be vital for how young children learn and underpins curriculum guidance across the UK (e.g. Department for Education and Skills [Citation2007](#); Welsh Assembly Government [Citation2008a](#); NCCA 2009; Learning and Teaching Scotland [Citation2010](#)). It is recommended that early year's practitioners participate and facilitate for learning and teaching via play. To enable learning through effective pedagogic interactions, practitioner's need to engage in play with children rather than leading play, for example, using open ended questions, sustained shared thinking and problem solving. In addition to this having a

playful and open-minded attitude will contribute to effective learning. Although play is a major factor in learning and development there are some challenges. For example, children have a tendency to see practitioners as the adult, a person of authority and therefore are less likely to ask the adult to engage in activity thus making it challenging to observe children in order to gauge their development. Another factor affecting this is the ability to do relevant observations on individual children within the setting alongside collective observations of the whole class. The reason being is although play relates to many factors in development and learning, it can be difficult to observe all areas of development in one activity of play, other negative factors include time constraints and staff limitation (not having the time nor staff to do each individual observation relating to play and development in lieu of observations that include adult led interaction, for example, literacy and numeracy). Although role play and creative play are similar they are still 2 different types of play, for example, creative play involves children using their imagination to create scenarios and situations. This type of involves using toys or props and includes dressing up whereas role play is more structured, where children will take on specific roles. Both types of play involve the use of imagination to create and act out scenarios, role play tends to be more structured whereas creative play is more imaginary and has no structure.

Section 2

Play is crucial to teaching and learning within early childhood, play is most beneficial when children believe this is a play experience rather than an adult led learning activity. Children recognise play using cues within their environment, cues can be classified as either emotional or environmental, for example, how easy the activity is, the amount of choice the child has within the activity and whether the activity is voluntary or not. Environmental cues are the physical nature of activity, where the activity is taking place and whether or not the adult is included within the activity. Adult presence is a critical cue therefore children appear less likely to perceive the activity of play where adults are present. A way to help change a child's viewpoint of this would be the way the adult approaches the child, by having a more playful attitude towards play, the child is more likely to see this as play, the use of open-ended questions is also suggested to be a successful form of communication within child – adult interaction. It is essential that practitioners provide enabling environments and a variety of activities, providing not only adult led activities but child led activities too, engaging in enjoyable experiences and building upon these, to enable successful learning. One effective pedagogy that could be beneficial would be allowing the children to co construct the activities, in addition to these base activities using children's perception of play. Self-directed play is completely natural and free flowing, where the child is in charge, it enables a sense of freedom and independence. Self-directed play enables the child to choose the activity, any props or toys they wish to play with and how they play, allowing the child the ability to be themselves, boosting their self-esteem by participating in activities they particularly enjoy or have a keen interest in. For example, the child may enjoy dressing up therefore will have a tendency to go into the home corner and recreate scenarios they have witnessed or make up a completely fictional world, there are no limits. A

practitioner can enable this by following the child's lead, taking up the persona of whichever character the child wishes them to be, a setting can enable this by providing various dressing up costumes. The setting can also supply various toys to use in the home corner, such as pretend kitchens and utensils, dolls and prams alongside various dressing up costumes. If practitioners were to focus on the child via observations this can then be used to link into their learning and development, in using the child's first-hand experiences. Froebel believed that children's self-directed play was an expression of their creativity, imagination and understanding of the world around them. Activities, such as art, music, language and dance, all foster the child's inner life as well as providing a means to transform and express understanding. According to Froebel, play is described as an activity that encloses all of the child, not only does it tend to a child's need for physical activity it also makes reference to the need to provide space for nurture, exploration and the ability to find joy and happiness in playful activities. Child led play enables the child to be at the centre of a activity therefore allowing the child to express themselves freely and allowing their interests to develop from within rather than being imposed upon by adults.

Section 3

Observations of children give you so much insight, it gives you information about the child's likes and dislikes, a view of their personality and the way they learn. Observations are crucial in early years development and as such, form part of the EYFS assessment and planning cycle, not only do they give you an insight to the child, but they are also a fantastic tool to use as a basis for reflection. There are various forms of observation depending on which type of observation you wish to carry out. There are many reasons for which an observation is carried out, these can be to evaluate the setting and/or the effectiveness of its use of rooms, to monitor staff and identify areas where further training may be required as well as self-reflecting on their pedagogy. Observations are also used to gain further knowledge of the child/children in the setting, how they respond to activities, monitoring the child's development, exploring the child/children's patterns of behaviours and their friendships including how they interact with adults. When choosing which type of observation to complete you must first consider why you are doing the observation and what you want to achieve, how long the observation will take and where the observation will take place. One observation technique used is a time sample observation, this is where the practitioner will observe the child every 5 minutes over a set period of time or look over at one specific area of the setting every half hour, hour to record what is happening in that specific area. In order to do this, the practitioner requires the ability and knowledge to be able to make observations frequently and consistently in a free-flowing environment. The practitioner will record their finding on a pre-prepared form, these findings are then used to identify how often that specific area is being used or whether it is not used at all or identify whether the child has a particular interest in a certain activity like painting or playing in the home corner. This type of observation does not just focus on one area of development or learning, it can significantly vary, dependent upon what the child chooses to do within the time frame of the observation. For example, at the beginning of the observation, the child may be playing in the home corner, pretending to cook a

meal for their friends, in this instance, you will have opportunity to identify the child's social and communication skills, their ability to interact with their friends. When it is time for you to observe again, five minutes later, said child is laying the table counting out a plate for each of their friends, thus displaying their numeracy skills as well as cognitive skills. The child then decides to play outside, this then gives you the opportunity to observe the physical development. This type of observation, short bursts of information obtained, during a hour of the day, has many benefits, one of those being that the child does not know they are being observed therefore you are more likely to gauge a genuine insight into how the child interacts and plays with their friends. Another benefit to this observation is its flexibility, because the child is able to move from one activity to another, this is also beneficial to the practitioner as they are able to observe a multitude of activities and link it into the child's development and learning. For example, role play will link into the child's communication and social skills, running and playing will link in to their cognitive and physical skills and counting will link into their numeracy skills. This type of observation does not take a massive amount of time to complete therefore giving the practitioner more time to spend with the children. However, there are some drawbacks to this type of observation, due to the observations being undertaken periodically, the practitioner may miss vital parts of play or aspects of the child's learning. Another drawback can be the number of children in the setting, for example, if observing a particular area of the setting on a day where there are not many children in then certain area may be played with less thus giving an inadequate result.

Section 4

Play is extremely important when undertaking observations, this is because when children are playing, they feel free, they are happy and content and able to express themselves. When engaging in play, children are in control of the direction and the outcome of their actions. In observing through play, it gives the practitioner a genuine insight into the child's interests therefore increasing their confidence and self-esteem, when a child is engaged in an activity that they enjoy, they concentrate on what they are doing, indicating strong motivational skills leading to a greater emotional wellbeing. This then allows the practitioner to be able to then plan the child's learning based upon their interest thus making learning more enjoyable meaning the child will be more likely to participate. For example, if a practitioner was to sit down with a child and explain to them that they wanted to do some counting activities while the practitioner sat and watched the child may then feel nervous or shy therefore less likely to participate. However, if a practitioner had observed that said child likes to play with building blocks then the practitioner could set an activity up to include blocks therefore meaning the child will be more likely to not only participate but also enjoy the activity maximising their learning potential. By incorporating play into a learning activity, it can produce effective, reliable results, in addition to this, it instils a sense of enjoyment from learning into the child, providing a stable base for further learning as children grow and develop. When children perceive an activity as play, they show more signs of emotional well-being than when they perceive the same activity as not play. Observations tend to have more accurate results when observing during play as the child is more natural, the child is also happy while playing therefore meeting their emotional, social and wellbeing

needs. By creating playful environments where children can play freely, we are also providing a rich learning environment for the children to thrive, learn and develop. If practitioners change the way they think and view play as a way of approaching a activity, this will in turn benefit the child, developing adult-child relationships. In addition to this, the children will then be more likely to use the cue of adult presence in a activity more positively enabling the adult to not only participate in the activity but also the ability to observe children while they are playing thus gaining a better knowledge of children in their care and how they learn and develop, by approaching a task of play, the practitioner is enhancing the child's cognitive and problem solving skills. Another technique practitioner can use is to be more playful, have a fun, positive attitude towards learning, this then develops the practitioner's relationship with the children meaning that the children will be more likely to include the adult in their play making it easier for the practitioner to observe. Asking children open ended questions rather than closed questions, using less formal speech and tones all contribute towards a positive learning experience. Play has great importance for the development of young children however in order to gauge the children's interest the practitioner needs to first identify said child's interest, this is done through observation and communication. Talking to the child and their parents/and or caregivers will give you a idea of this, this will then give you the foundation upon which to build your rapport with the child and base activities of which the child enjoys so observations can be completed. In providing a setting where the child can play freely, both indoors and outdoors will give greater opportunities for observations via play.

Referencing list play assignment

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