

Section 1

Play is an important part of early childhood as children are allowed to learn and discover new things through a range of different experiences. Through playing, children can develop their social and cognitive skills and allows them to think creatively whilst playing and develop their imagination further (Irvin 2017). As stated in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have the right to engage in play and by doing so children feel a range of different emotions such as enjoyment, disappointment, and encouragement and by having their right to play children can take these opportunities to work on and develop how they deal with the different types of emotions (British Psychology Society 2019).

Sensory play allows children to engage with all their senses from taste to touch, when a child can use sensory play, they are encouraged to use their senses whilst exploring and this could be in an indoor environment or outdoors and children are inspired to explore a range of different objects within their new environment (Education Play Care 2016). Piaget states that children's curiosity is what drives their interaction and ability to learn in different situations and children need to explore and play with different types of objects to guide their cognitive development and the new information they learn during play and the experiences they will gain may not have been exposed to them if they did not have a right to play (Wokingham Government nd). The use of sensory play allows children to learn a range of new words and description, if they are playing with different foods, they can be hot or cold, slimy, or soft, children will then see what they are playing with in a different way and how it can be changed, and their use of a new vocabulary will benefit them in different areas of learning (Rainbow Smiles 2013).

Practitioners should allow children the choice of different play experiences and this will allow children to choose whether they would like to participate or not and if they are given the choice of what they would like to play with then they will have the want to learn whilst they play (Welsh Government 2015). Sensory play should be supported in practice by allowing children the time and freedom to engage in environments that will heighten their senses and by observing children during sensory play, practitioners will get an insight into a child's interests and their creativity whilst playing (Gascoyne 2012).

Children that participate in creative play are allowing themselves the freedom to put their utmost effort into making whatever they are doing into their own. Creative play plays a vital part in a child's development as they are provided with opportunities to use their imagination in whatever way they like, and it allows children to think in new ways than they would whilst not being creative (Rhino Play 2018). Creative play allows children to learn about the world and by using their imagination children can try new ways of doing things and experiment in different situations they may not get to do daily. Creative play can allow children to use their imagination to pretend to be someone or something else or if they are playing with an object then they can pretend that it is something else even though children do not need objects to use their imagination this could occur when they are playing alone or with another child (Raising Children 2019). Hand eye coordination can be developed through creative play and activities such as cutting and gluing can allow children to use a range of different materials such as cotton wool, tissue paper and cardboard and cut them into all kinds of shapes and using scissors can allow children to develop their hand eye coordination whilst engaging in creative play (Empowered Parents 2022).

When children are encouraged to play creatively, it is a way for them to express how they feel, and they can find their own identity as this play is a comfortable place for children to have complete control over what they can do and what they cannot. Creative play is open ended which allows all children to think creatively to create things that are unique which do not need adult supervision and allows children to think freely by using a range of different objects around them with different textures and smells that may not be familiar to them (Today's Parent 2020).

Section 2

Self-directed play is a concept that allows children to play of their own accord with no direction from adults and no instructions to follow. Children may already be participating in their own self-directed when engaging in activities such as making music from pots and pans or using small objects such as buttons to use as make-believe food as when children are given a choice of self-directed play, they can experience what their use of imagination can truly do and to take risks by using a range of different objects in different environments (Broadhead 2010).

Children have a freedom to decide when they want to play, how they want to play and what they want to play as children must be willing to participate in a certain activity and not forced to do so. Self-directed play allows children the opportunity to build on their own confidence and by exploring this they will realise that there is a lot of things that they can do for themselves without relying on an adult, they can come up with their own games, their own rules all by themselves (Howard 2013).

When children are choosing their own play, they can use their creativity and improvise how they want to play as there is no goal to self-directed play and there are endless opportunities to what they can do. However, if a child participates in a non-play activity, then there is a goal they must work towards, and they will need to follow rules or instructions in order to reach this goal. Although children benefit from self-directed play and activities which do not involve play, children engage better with self-directed play due to having a sense of freedom to use their imagination and control the situation they are in and there are no pressures to do things the correct way or the wrong way. Children can learn a range of new things during play, but it also encourages children to become motivated and are happier as they develop key life skills and learn how to become playful and how to play with other children and practise social interaction with others whilst determine the outcome of their play and what their intentions are whilst playing (Brown 2014). Howard and Mcinnes (2013) states that through play, children that associate a certain activity with play show better signs of emotional well-being and there's a difference seen between children participating in an activity that is not like play.

Children that make up their own play become an expert in it and the rules of their play and adults can support their child and their play by watching and listening to them play and only getting involved if the child has invited the adult to play and not to get too involved and take over (Juster 2015). When children choose to embark on self-directed play, adults should be reminded to take a step back and observe the child in a certain activity rather than getting involved with the child. The more adults stand back and watch the child play, they will begin to notice how the child is progressing by choosing their own play and self-directed play is a crucial part of a child's development as it allows children to act independently and use their imagination to play the way they want to (Howard 2020).

Adult must ensure that the environment of play is safe and suitable for the child during self-directed play and offer a range of different environments that will allow children to have a range of different areas to play in which have different resources in each one and this will encourage children to differentiate the way they play in each environment and provide opportunities to express different feelings or emotion in each environment and develop their use of their senses by offering different usage of sounds, colours and lights (Michigan State University 2015). Montessori believed that play is the work of a child and children grow and learn through choosing their own play. An adult's job is to enable a safe space for children and protect the space and time to ensure that children can play freely and to follow their creativity to see where it would lead them. Montessori observed children at their happiest when they were given real materials to play with such as watering cans that were filled with water or brushes that would sweep things off the floor and that allowed children to do what they wanted to with the objects given to them (Pound 2005).

Section 3

Observation is used in early year settings to monitor children early on in their educational development and observation is a process of listening, watching, and understanding children through the way they play and learn. By doing so, practitioners can set out activities that are suitable for each child and gain an insight into the way children think about different things and to allow children to work on their development and their growth through early years settings, (Bruce 2015). Observations are at their most successful when a child is participating in an activity that they have chosen to do as it allows practitioners to gain more information about a child's interests and how they learn when they are doing things they enjoy doing. Although observations can help practitioners to know what children are good at, it can also identify if children have any learning delays or behavioural issues, and these can be picked up on during observations and practitioners can take the next steps into allowing the correct procedures are taking for the children to get the support they need to develop and work on any issues (PACEY 2016).

The foundation phase allows every child to have equal learning experiences and each child will gain the same knowledge as others and within the curriculum framework they state that through play, children can learn by playing with different ideas, solve problems and make independent decisions whether they are working on their own, in small groups or in large

groups. Children will develop the way they deal with their feelings and the range of emotions they will experience through play, (Welsh Government 2015). For an observation to be completely accurate, children must be observed in both indoor and outdoor settings as children may behave differently in one environment to another and a reflection of this must be documented in the observation for it to be successful. Observations must also be both enhanced and focused provision and a mixture of child led and practitioner-led activities to truly see how children interact in different environments (Welsh Government 2017).

The Welsh Government provides guidance to both parents and practitioners that the foundation phase emphasises the importance of play in each child's lives and the benefits they will gain to their learning, their health and their overall happiness whilst also providing a foundation that will ensure every child reaches their full potential by the time they move onto their next stage in life. Wales's play policy has recognised that children need to have a required quality and quantity of opportunities to play for different environments. Quantity of play is regarding the number of activities a child can participate in at different times and the quality is to ensure children have the opportunity to play with other children of the same and different ages and to play in an outdoor environment with natural resources such as mud, insects and water (Welsh Government 2014). Froebel believed that play contributes to a child's development and the way they learn physically and intellectually, and play plays a big part in the way children manage their feelings and their thoughts and the way they can come up with and think of new ideas and it allows children to relate to others in different environments (Tovey 2016).

When being observed, every child will come into a setting and have a different experience to what another child would have and each of the experiences will have an impact on how some children learn and develop and for other children it may show that they need more time in a setting as they do not have the development to carry out an activity and an observation will ensure that if this happens all the correct provisions will be put into place for children who need additional learning needs (ALN) will get the support they need. However, some children with ALN may not get picked up on their observation if they are being observed by a practitioner in an early year setting that does not have the correct skills to know what they are looking for when observing and what to do if things may stand out. Due to this, schools must

ensure that all professionals have the correct information to ensure every child get the support needed for them and all their needs are met, (Smidt 2015).

Section 4

Giving children the choice to do something on their own accord gives them the opportunity to have control over what they do and although some children may listen and do whatever activity a professional tells them to do, whereas other children would prefer to be given their own choice over what to do. Making thoughtful and independent decisions is a skill that children will learn throughout their lives, and it is beneficial to learn his skill at a young age (Forman 2005).

Practitioners should also observe what the child has chosen to play with and look at how they played with the toy, for how long and did they think of new ways to play with the toy or stick to one thing. Studies show that children who engage in play that offers them control is beneficial to a child's learning development and this may not be developed fully if adults are present to differentiate between what is play and what is not play. If children are able to differentiate themselves then they will see different activities in their own playful way (Howard 2010). However, in the Bennet *et al.* (1997) study, children may find some play as being repetitive if they are given the same things or environment to play in many times, this may be because children have already reached their goal during the play and need to move on to something new. Children may also be told to take part in play that is not appropriate for their level, and this will not benefit the learning of a child and practitioners should know through observing children when they need to move on to something new or if they can develop further in their play.

Piaget thought of play as an important development of children's intelligence and as children mature, their environment and play should be encouraged further. Children engage in different types of play that meet their current cognitive development stage. Children's curiosity with play is what drives their interaction with the environment and their learning as through playing they explore a range of different objects and materials within different environments (very well mind 2019). Children do not go into a play activity thinking they are going to learn something yet playing is one of the most powerful ways to learn and develop as their skills are being encouraged through their play. An example of this is when children

are playing, they can develop their social skills by playing with new children or in a big group of children and working together to make their play successful (UNICEF 2018).

Although play can be purposeful at times, it brings joy to children and intrinsic play allows children to engage with play that is chosen freely for the satisfaction and happiness it brings to children rather than there being an extrinsic goal or any motivation behind the play. Some consider intrinsic motivation to encourage children to become successful as they will achieve better results by engaging in something they want to do that does not have an end goal whereas being extrinsically motivated attains an outcome which may put children away from doing something as it would not be considered as 'free play' as they are playing to get an outcome rather than to enjoy and do something they love (Parenting For Brain 2021).

Peter Gray believes that whilst playing, children are educating themselves through their exploring and within different environments and they need enough time to explore and play whilst having enough resources available to ensure they learn new skills and figuring out different objects for themselves and exploring how they work. Time is a key factor of play, according to Gray, as children need time to understand how different types of play work and figure out for themselves what play they like and what they get bored of (Camp Stomping Ground, 2015).

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