

I confirm that I have not used any AI tools in the research and creation of this assignment. I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated materials as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used, which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

Contents

Section 1:- Evidence of a clear understanding of the importance of a variety of play types. The significance of holistic play should also be considered.

Section 2:- Evidence of a clear understanding of why it is important for children to choose their own play and the importance of the role of the adult in children's play.

Section 3:- In depth discussion and understanding of an observation method for young children.

Section 4:- Demonstrate an understanding of the role of play when undertaking observations and assessments of children and consider how this affects the child's engagement and the accuracy of the observation.

Reference List

Section 1

The way children play can differ from each child, this can be seen through observations within early years settings, homes, playgrounds and groups (Pathways, 2023). Play is about having fun, as children grow, they will go through the different stages of play development (Thomas, 2023). According to Mildred Parten (Thomas, 2023), there are six stages of play which children will go through during their early years of development.

Firstly, there is unoccupied play, where babies and young children explore their surroundings without any organisation. Solitary play follows and is when children are freely playing with little or no interest in other children (Brodie, 2024).

Onlooker play, this is while children sit back and observe other children playing but do not join in. Parallel play involves children playing in close proximity to each other but not together (Drew and Cornell, 2024).

Finally, the last two stages of play are associative play and cooperative play.

Associative play is when the children begin to seem more interested in the other children playing rather than what they are playing. Cooperative play, this is when the children try to establish rules and hierarchy with their peers (Rymanowicz, 2015).

Following on from this is how communication play is important to development. Communication play is a type of social play which develops children confidence and their willingness to communicate with their peers by learning to share, take turns, telling stories and voicing their ideas (Rice, no date). Examples of communication play similar to what Rice has stated, that includes copying others, hand gestures, body language, facial expressions, singing and rhyming (Lion, 2022).

However, there will be children with additional learning needs (ALN), that are unable to communicate verbally or just need extra support to coincide with the speech they do have. Children with ALN may use sign or use an AAC (Augmentative and alternative communication) device. These devices come in many forms, electronically forms such as tablets and ipads with apps pre-installed and paper based, such as core boards (Sense, 2023).

Another form of play is sensory play. An example of this would be children using their proprioceptive senses to explore by touching, listening, smelling and tasting (Action

for Children, 2022). Other examples of exploratory play also involve vestibular senses. Such as movement, whether children are swinging, climbing, reaching and jumping on or over objects (Lion, 2022). Through this type of play children are constantly risk taking and analyzing 'what if'. Sensory play includes any type of play that draws one or more of a child's senses (Hernandez Parks, 2023).

Furthermore, similar to what Hernandez Parks has stated, sensory play benefits children to identify how their actions influence what is around them. This leads on to supports brain development, boosting memory and problem solving on their own or with their peers (Action for Children, 2022).

However, there are some children who may experience difficulties and encounter sensory sensitivity (Rice, no date). Although every child may experience difficulties at different times (Nabil, 2020). As early years practitioners, there needs to be awareness of how sensory play can help children to self-regulate, when they are in a heightened state of arousal and to feel safe (Maslow, 1943 cited in Lopez, 2023). Not only but also, it can have the reverse affect and stimulate a child who appears not to be motivated to join in (Cleveland Clinic, 2022).

As early years practitioners, there should be an understanding that play is vital for children's learning. Play underlines all aspects of children's development, particularly focusing on the holistic approach (Rigby, 2024). Similar to the above statement, learning through play helps children increase the skills they need to flourish. When children play, they have fun, they test, they take risks and they do not worry about making mistakes (The LEGO Foundation, 2025).

Friedrich Froebel's believed that children need to have the chance to choose their own play, as this supports independence and not being told when and how to play (Connected Childcare, 2024). However, Lev Vygotsky believed the role of directed adult input and scaffolding in learning, can influence children to develop quicker with support, rather than playing alone (Smolucha and Smolucha, 2021).

In 2002, the Welsh Government published the first play policy in the world. It is based primarily on the value of the UNCRC that recognises the importance of play (Play Wales, 2022). However, there are many reasons for the decline in play. One being that learning in school has become more important and more stressful for children. Furthermore, there is an increase in fear regarding the safety of children

when playing outside and unsupervised, thus portraying imaginative and free play being almost non-existent (Little Seeds, 2018).

Section 2

Self-directed play is an example of play that children solely choose. Children choose what to play and decide their own rules on how to play (McLaren, 2023). Another example of self-directed play, similar to McLaren, is that a type of learning happens when children are encouraged to explore their own interests and ideas, without being directed by an adult (Craycroft, 2022).

According to Dr Michael Patte (no date), the benefit of unstructured play provides children opportunities, to become experts within their world, in their own terms. It also enhances cognitive understandings, but also builds strength, coordination and improve creativity and imagination. Dr Michael Patte, also goes on to say that the benefit of unstructured play, improves whole child development.

However, some may argue (Melbourne Kids Village, 2023) that unstructured play could have some obstacles. In other words, without organization or guidance, children may find it difficult to come up with ideas of their own, or participate in play for lengthy periods (Vygotsky, 1962 cited in Stem Learning, no date).

There is an amalgamation between the two types of play structured and unstructured, where there must be a balance between the two. Children succeed when stability and consistency are met, along with having enough free time to explore and choose their own activities (Guest, 2021). According to Phillip (2023), structured play is often achieved by practitioners, whereas parents often offer children with most of the unstructured play.

Adults can support self-directed play by adjusting their level of involvement. This can be established by the interactions and reactions of the child (Whalley, 2021). The role of the adult is to analyse self-directed play, by collecting information through observations, conversing with the children and consider their ideas of play needs and preferences (Skills Active, 2016). Furthermore, The Play Sufficiency Duty began as two parts, with the second part starting in 2014. It is still relevant today, and it states that local authorities need to acquire sufficient opportunities, for children to

play in their local areas, thus following the policies and procedures for the creation of play spaces (Play Wales, 2014).

However, during the Covid-19 pandemic, many outdoor play areas were closed. Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council decided to open playgrounds and outdoor areas in July 2020. Although, the local authority had strict guidelines to follow which were signposted at each entrance for all playground users (Jones, 2020). During this time self-directed play was restricted, and it was the role of the adult at home or in an outdoor area to facilitate play. Thus, removing the freedom of choice for all children, as well as, restricting physical activity (Paglialonga *et al.*, 2023).

Following on from this, some children thrive from being outdoors, it promotes problem solving, adaptability and resilience (Caloo Ltd, 2022). Having access to outdoor resources, with freedom to explore, creates natural curiosity (The Steiner Connection, 2022). Providing a safe inclusive environment for children to explore, whilst meeting the needs of individuals. It gives children with all abilities, the feeling of belonging and promotes self-esteem (Maslow, 1943 cited in Learning through Landscapes, 2025).

Section 3

Observations help early years practitioners to identify children's progress, allowing practitioners to design personal learning experiences, that meet each child's abilities and interests (Connected Childcare, 2024). Observations also allows practitioners, to monitor children to see how they behave, their physical actions, gestures and listening to them interacting with their peers (Azilo Training, 2019). This enables practitioners to be able to identify any significant needs.

The Leuven Scales were influenced by theorists in psychology and education, mostly by the theory of cognitive development (Piaget, 1967 cited in Brodie, 2025).

According to Learning Journals (2021) The Leuven Scales is a five-point scale. It helps practitioner's measure well-being and involvement, engagement, relationships and classroom behaviour (Jackson, 2023). The Leuven Scales looks at well-being as a spectrum, a child can show high or low levels of well-being or fall in the middle (Longley, 2024).

According to Structural Learning (2021) the main advantage of The Leuven Scales is that it is based on meaningful observations and puts the children at the centre of learning, and it is most beneficial in the early years.

The Leuven Scale of involvement is not always about the child's emotions, but more about how motivated and occupied they are in what they are participating in (Arnerich, 2021).

According to Gosling (2021) assessing the children, practitioners need to observe them for roughly two minutes at usual times and then give a 1 to 5 score for both well-being and involvement, Level 1 being extremely low and Level 5 being extremely high. Lewis (2011) states, unless children are operating at level 4 or 5 for both well-being and involvement, learning may become limited. It is normal for children's levels of well-being and involvement to change through the day; therefore, it is unrealistic to expect children to consistently be at level 4 or 5.

McRae and Jones (2023) suggest that it may be helpful to consider, that the use of The Leuven Scales can help practitioners to try and be more like a child, to value the worth of interaction, that is characterised by a child's well-being and involvement. In other words, practitioners can show children how important they are, this can be seen by joining in, copying the children, getting down to their level and ensuring that there is plenty of time to explore with them (Mainstone-Cotton, 2018).

However, there are disadvantages to The Leuven Scales. The scale does not work well for children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN), the behaviours set out in the scale, are sometimes not present or as evident with children with ALN, especially children who are non-verbal (Learning Journals, 2021).

Furthermore, another criticism of The Leuven Scales can also be used, when reflecting on cultural differences from around the world, when it comes to the behaviour of children, and falls into the same issues as described in the theory of attachment (Bowlby, 1958 cited in Brodie, 2024), that children's behaviour differs across different cultures.

There are positives to take from the use of The Leuven Scales, it provides a simple and easy way for practitioners to determine engagement and learning outcomes. Moorhouse states (2025), although there maybe disadvantages to The Leuven

Scales, the practical use and the readily availability of it, helps makes informative analysis of the quality and appropriateness of practitioner's work. As well as providing a basis for interventions and a holistic approach to individual children.

This links into the United Conventions on Rights of a Child (UNCRC) with Article 12 stating the right of the child to express their views and have their views taken seriously (UNICEF, no date) with parents and other professionals working in partnership and being involved in planning opportunities and experiences to offer the children.

Following on, it is reiterated in the journal from Carr (2011), which links with Article 12, where the children have opportunities to reflect on their learning. The aim was for practitioners to find ways to help the children to communicate in their own way, in understanding what they had learned, and how they had learned it.

Section 4

Practitioners and parents should observe children when they are fully engaged in play, the reason for this is, it will help them understand the child's development, also reflecting on the children's likes and dislikes and to address the needs of each individual child (Louis, 2020).

According to Louis (2022) observing children is more than just describing what a child does. Observations provide understandings into what motivates and engages them. When children play, they frequently show their real interests, strengths, and areas of growth. By carefully watching the children, parents and practitioners can understand the child's cognitive, social and emotional development better.

The spiral theory from Moyles (1989, cited in Smith 2021) states that children should be allowed to play with resources freely first, then participate in structured play and then play freely again. Supporting practitioners to join in, in playful teaching using Moyles spiral theory can lead to positive outcomes for children.

According to McInnes and Howard (2012) as well as observations providing evidence about the value of play for improving children's emotional well-being. Their findings focus on the training needs of practitioners, to allow them to recognise children's views about play. It also shows ways to adapt playful situations which increases the developmental ability of play.

When practitioners observe it can be described as a neutral method of obtaining facts, as shown by a child through their actions and their voice (Machan, 2016).

Adults can support children's play by providing a variety of materials and resources to encourage creativity, offer a safe learning space and allowing the children to follow their own play needs, as well as talking about play and extending support by engaging with the children (Amin, 2022).

Following on, adults can also be an additional support during play by preventing problems. In other words, adults can intervene if a situation may happen when a child or children may need some help, whether it is a clash, or a problem or safety concern (Rymanowicz, 2015).

However, there are disadvantages to adult led play. According to Titus (no date) providing too much structured play reduces time for free, child-centred play. It can interfere with the value of creativity, imagination, decision-making, as well as emotional, cognitive and physical strength of the child.

With the introduction of technology being widely available for children of all ages. It can sometimes take away the curiosity approach for children, where children can be as creative as they want, all in a safe and loving environment (Maslow, 1943 cited in Jackson, 2022). Jackson (2022) states that the developmental risk children face, stems from the use of technology and the lack of imagination children show.

Technology can reduce attention span, limit physical activity and reduce self-regulation, as a distraction is always readily available in the form of a smartphone or even an interactive computer within a early years setting (Dong, 2021).

According to Woffindin (2025) technology has become a fundamental aspect of modern childhood, parents and practitioners can encourage a balanced approach to screen time, this can help children to use technology responsibly.

This links to the new curriculum for Wales, Area of Learning Experience (AoLE). According to Welsh Government (2019) Science and Technology, will be ever more appropriate in the opportunities children face and the choices that they make.

Moreover, this links to one of the four purposes of the curriculum for Wales. Ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives. According to Welsh Government (2020) children should be involved with scientific and technological changes, gaining experience in what matters in science and technology.

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