

AI Statement

I acknowledge the use of Copilot in line with the guidance given by UWTSD for Module ECEY4003 between 05/01/2026 & 01/03/2026

I used the prompt(s):

1. Check my work for grammatical errors and spelling- Use UK format and do not make any changes to the structure of my sentences
2. Put my Harvard references into alphabetical order

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

I confirm I have retained 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 in evidence

Play Types and how these can be supported

Exploratory Play

Exploratory play is one of the earliest foundations of children's learning. Through this type of play, children use their senses and physical actions to investigate, manipulate, and make meaning from the objects and environments around them (Rees Edwards, cited in Waters-Davies, 2022). From birth, babies begin exploring the world, they root and suckle instinctively, start gazing at and examining their hands around 2–3 months, and by about 7 months may deliberately throw their beaker from a highchair, actions that reflect natural curiosity and a drive to understand cause and effect (Lindon, 2010).

Grounded in Bruner's (1966) view that children learn most effectively through hands on discovery, this form of play encourages experimentation, problem solving, and independent inquiry. In infancy, these simple sensorimotor actions help children begin to understand the properties of objects and establish the foundations for later symbolic and imaginative thinking, consistent with Piaget's (1962) developmental progression.

A common example of exploration can be seen when a baby engages with a treasure basket filled with everyday items such as metal spoons, wooden blocks, fabric squares and small pots. As the baby bangs, shakes, drops or mouths the objects they notice variations in weight, texture, sound and movement. These repeated actions reflect children's early attempts to investigate cause and effect, develop object permanence, and gradually form mental representations (Goldschmied & Jackson, 2004).

Goldschmied who was a Froebelian early childhood educator believed that the rich sensory experiences offered through a Treasure Basket supported the formation of early brain connections, helping to build the groundwork for later learning, cognitive growth, early problem solving and emerging language skills (Goldschmied & Jackson, 2004).

This also aligns with Parten's (1932) stage of solitary play, in which she proposed that children often focus on manipulating materials, testing ideas, and discovering outcomes independently, without the need for social interaction. According to Parten, this form of play provides essential cognitive foundations that support the emergence of later, more complex

types of play and learning, although she believed these developments occurred in predictable, age-linked stages.

However, this research does not fully consider wider influences such as the quality of adult scaffolding, socioeconomic disadvantages, or limited access to high quality resources which can restrict children's opportunities to explore (Muentener, Herrig & Schulz, 2018; Smilansky, 1968). Goldschmied (2004) emphasised that secure relationships, rich environments and sensitive caregiving were vital to support children's development.

In contemporary practice, exploratory play is further supported through open-ended, sensory-rich, enabling environments where children have the time, autonomy, and freedom to follow their curiosity. Practitioners play a crucial role in supporting this by observing sensitively, recognising children's emerging interests, and enriching their thinking through descriptive language while still maintaining a child-led approach to discovery (Welsh Government, 2022).

Imaginative Play

Imaginative play often referred to as pretend or role play involves children creating imaginary scenarios, adopting roles, and using objects symbolically to represent something else (Bergen, 2001).

This form of play is associated with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978), which emphasises that mature pretend play involves children constructing imaginary situations and acting out roles that allow them to operate beyond their everyday capabilities. Through this play, Vygotsky argued that children develop self-regulation, higher order thinking and social understanding. Piaget (1962) also recognised that symbolic play was evidence of children's growing capacity to use objects in representational ways, forming stepping stones towards abstract thought and logical reasoning.

This was observed during a toddler's free flow play (James, 2026). The child approached the basket of wooden blocks and selected a smooth, rectangular block. After holding it briefly, she lifted the block to her ear and began to 'talk' into it as though it were a mobile phone. She paused between vocalisations, nodded, paced back and forth and produced rhythmic,

conversational sounds that echoed the turn-taking patterns she had observed in real interactions.

Although the child's spoken language was still emerging, she demonstrated an ability to assign symbolic meaning to the block and adopt a familiar social role, likely modelled on her parent using a phone. This act of transforming an everyday object into something with an invented function is a clear example of symbolic representation, a key feature of the pre-operational stage described by Piaget (1962). Piaget argued that once children can use one object to stand for another, they begin engaging in imaginative play that supports cognitive flexibility and abstract thinking.

Modern theorists such as Berk (2022) argue that symbolic substitutions like these help children distinguish imagination from reality and strengthen early self-regulation skills.

While exploratory play focuses on investigating the real-world properties of materials, imaginative play emphasises narrative, symbolism, and make believe. For example, where a child in imaginative play may pretend water is a magic potion, in exploratory play they swirl the water to observe how it moves. Both are child led and curiosity driven, but each supports different aspects of development.

According to Devi, Fler and Li (2021) pretend and role play give children opportunities to explore alternative situations and act out scenarios beyond everyday reality, engaging complex cognitive processes as they experiment with new possibilities.

However, while many theorists including Vygotsky argue that imaginative play actively drives cognitive development, other researchers such as Lillard (2013) suggest that pretend play may not uniquely cause developmental gains. Instead, they suggest that imaginative play provides a context in which children express existing skills rather than generate new ones.

In practice, imaginative play can be strengthened by providing open ended loose parts, flexible roleplay spaces, and uninterrupted time for children to develop. Practitioners can extend thinking by modelling rich language and supporting children to negotiate roles and storylines while maintaining child-led direction (Welsh Government, 2024).

The importance of children's choice and the role of the adult

According to the UNCRC (2013, cited in Play Wales, 2026) play is defined as 'a behaviour, activity or process initiated, controlled and structured by children'. Play takes place whenever and wherever opportunities arise, cementing that a child's play is a right not a luxury. It Protects children's autonomy over where and how they play and highlights that children learn best when they have control over their own play.

In recent years, educational approaches and pedagogies such as play based, child led and curiosity driven have increasingly recognised the value of child led, play based learning as an effective method for supporting young children's cognitive development, wellbeing, belonging and recognising children as capable, confident learners (Welsh Government, 2024).

Aligning with Montessori (n.d) and Piaget's idea that 'play is children's work' (Jakobsen & Fischer, 2025, n.p) The Welsh Government (2002) believe that when children are given opportunities to choose their own play, they are intrinsically motivated, can become deeply engaged and are more likely to sustain concentration.

Wales is internationally recognised for its progressive commitment to children's rights and was the first country to legislate specifically for a child's right to play, firmly embedding play as a protected entitlement in national policy (Play Wales, 2025). When children have genuine ownership of their play, they are better able to express emotions, make sense of experiences, develop resilience, and build belonging, self-esteem, and agency (Welsh Government, 2023). However, despite these strong policy commitments, the non-statutory status of the CFNMS can lead to a gap between policy intentions and everyday practice, resulting in inconsistencies across settings (Stewart, MacDonald & Waters Davies, 2025).

An example of child led play was observed during a Forest School session during a LA playday (James, 2026) A three-year-old child discovered a fallen log and chose to climb it. After slipping on his first attempt, he reassessed the situation and tried again. Reaching the end, he proudly called, 'I did it!' before experimenting with different ways of crossing and inviting another child to join. Throughout, he independently decided how fast to go, what techniques to try, and how much risk felt comfortable, showing clear agency and developing confidence.

The play leader remained close by but did not direct the play. Acting as an observer and risk supporter, they trusted the child to make judgements while ensuring the environment was safe. Their involvement was limited to descriptive, non-directive comments such as 'You are checking how wobbly the log is' supporting his self-assessment rather than giving instructions. They offered help only if invited, allowing his challenge to unfold at his own pace. Had the practitioner taken control, directed, instructed, removed risk, or interrupted the play this would have undermined the child's agency, limited problem solving, and prevented the deeper learning that occurred through his self-initiated exploration.

With a workforce retention problem in Wales it has been widely reported that settings are struggling to maintain a workforce of highly qualified and experienced practitioners (Early Years Alliance, 2024), Practitioners new to EY childcare or those that are unfamiliar with autonomy supportive practice, may intervene too quickly, direct activities, prioritise structured routines over supporting children's autonomous choice or limit risk-taking because they do not feel confident supporting open ended play. Welsh ECPLC (2025) guidance underlines the need for high quality training to ensure environments and routines are genuinely autonomy supportive and highlights the significance that adults play in how children access their right to play.

While child led play is fundamental, theory and research consistently highlight that high-quality play does not occur in the absence of adults. Instead, the adult's role shifts from instructor to enabler, facilitator and scaffold.

The CFNMS (2022) reflects this evidence through its concept of the 'enabling adult', the term given to a practitioner who creates effective environments, observes children closely and responds to their interests and developmental needs by enhancing the experiences, opportunities and resources they have access to.

Playwork theory further strengthens the argument for adult sensitivity in children's self-directed play. Sturrock and Else (2005) describe 'play cues' as the verbal, physical or behavioural signals children use to initiate or invite continued play.

When adults recognise and respect these cues, they support the unfolding of 'play cycles' the complete process of a child beginning, developing, and bringing play to a natural close. Understanding these processes prevents adult interruption prematurely breaking the play

cycle, reducing engagement, motivation, and depth of learning. Being sensitively ‘tuned in’ allows practitioners to decide whether to stand back, join in, or subtly extend the play, ensuring that adult involvement enhances rather than directs the play experience (Sturrock & Else, 2005).

This can be seen in high-quality early years settings where routines do not dominate the day. Instead, children can lead their own learning, experience long periods of uninterrupted play, and have opportunities to return to their play after taking a break, allowing their ideas and play cycles to develop more deeply.

Children learn most effectively when supported by a knowledgeable adult who provides appropriate scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978). This support is offered just beyond the child’s current level of independent ability, enabling them to achieve tasks they could not manage alone. Such scaffolding may involve modelling language, asking open-ended questions, demonstrating new ways of using materials, or introducing additional resources to extend the child’s thinking. Through this sensitive guidance, adults help children to build confidence, deepen understanding, and progress to higher levels of learning (Vygotsky, 1978, cited in Early Years TV, n.d).

However, Vygotsky’s theories raise questions about whether his ideas can be fully applied across all cultural settings (Zacher, 2008). This becomes particularly relevant when compared with Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1979), which recognises the powerful influence of multiple environmental layers on a child’s development. Within early years practice, this highlights the importance of considering how a child’s cultural, social, and historical experiences shape their play and learning. A strong key-worker system enables practitioners to build meaningful relationships with children, allowing them to tailor interactions and pedagogical approaches in ways that acknowledge and support each child’s unique background (Welsh Government, 2021).

Observational Method – Learning Stories

Learning Stories are a narrative-based observational approach recognised for capturing the richness of children’s learning in authentic, meaningful contexts. Originating in New Zealand

and grounded in their Te Whariki (2017) curricula, they emphasise holistic development, children's voices, and a strengths focused perspective that highlights what children can do rather than what they cannot (Carr and Lee, 2012). This aligns closely with the Curriculum for Wales (2022), which prioritises child-led learning, real life experiences, and strong connections with family and community.

In practice, Learning Stories are constructed over time through narrative text, photographs, videos and annotated reflections, sometimes written in the child's own voice and often incorporating contributions from practitioners and families. This multi voiced approach provides a holistic account of learning and identity development (Boss, 2024). Carr *et al.* (2024) outline that compared with traditional observational methods such as checklists or time samples, Learning Stories offer deeper insights into children's behaviours, interests, skills, knowledge and emerging working theories, enabling practitioners to understand how children make sense of their world. They also foreground cultural identity, family context and preferred ways of learning, which distinguishes them from more linear or standardised forms of assessments such as SOGS and Flying Start FPP's.

A practical example of this can be seen in a Learning Story written for a three-year-old in a Flying Start setting who repeatedly transports objects around the outdoor area. A traditional checklist might simply record 'transporting schema observed', but the Learning Story captures the wider learning taking place. The practitioner describes how the child carefully filled a wheelbarrow with pinecones, moved them across the garden and announced, 'I'm taking them to nanny's'. Through sensitive observation the practitioner recognised that this behaviour reflected not only a transporting schema but also emerging symbolic play, spatial awareness and early problem solving. When shared with the family, the parent added that the child had recently been helping carry shopping bags at grandparents, offering a meaningful link between setting and family context. This multi voiced perspective enabled the practitioner to plan next steps such as providing a selection of containers and loose parts while also validating the child's identity, interests, and home experiences.

This approach is also particularly valuable for children with Additional Needs or those whose learning is expressed through sensory engagement, movement, emotional expression or repetitive routines, as these behaviours are often overlooked or misunderstood by checklist-based assessments (Carr and Lee, 2012). In contrast, Learning Stories capture

learning that is relational, embodied, sensory and emergent, offering a more authentic picture of the child's strengths and developmental processes (The Education Hub, 2020).

Additionally, because Learning Stories incorporate multiple perspectives including those of practitioners, children and their families they align closely with the collaborative, person-centred approach required within the Welsh IDP process. The ALN Code for Wales (2021) states that parents' insights, wishes and lived experiences must meaningfully inform planning and decision making for their child, and Learning Stories naturally support this by highlighting family voice and shared understanding (Welsh Government, 2021).

By contrast, despite these strengths Learning Stories can be time consuming to produce and require practitioners to possess strong observational and narrative writing skills, meaning their quality and consistency can vary depending on staff confidence and capacity (Louis, 2022).

The Nutbrown Review (2012) highlighted that high quality assessment depends on practitioners being well trained and confident in making meaningful, accurate observations, creating an expectation that settings provide appropriate training and ongoing support for staff undertaking them. However, this can be challenging in practice. In addition to staffing and ratio pressures due to the retention and recruitment crisis, financial constraints present a significant barrier to implementing high quality observational approaches such as Learning Stories (Early Years Alliance, 2024). Recent reporting by Nation Cymru (2025) indicates that many early years settings in Wales are experiencing severe financial instability, leaving providers struggling to balance the implementation of high-quality provision with the increasing financial pressures associated with delivering it.

The impact of play on children's engagement and the reliability of observational assessment.

(Fisher, 2016) believes that play is important for high-quality observation and assessments because children's deepest engagement, richest thinking and most genuine behaviours emerge when they are directing their own activity.

In 1840, Friedrich Froebel founded his first Kindergarten and viewed observation as an essential element of high-quality practice, arguing that practitioners must observe children closely, sensitively and naturally to truly understand their developmental needs. Froebel emphasised that children should be supported through 'freedom with guidance', where adults notice, reflect and respond without interrupting the child's intrinsic motivation (Froebel, 2005).

These principles continue to influence contemporary early years guidance, reinforcing Froebel's belief that high-quality assessment begins with understanding children through their play. It aligns with modern frameworks such as the Curriculum for Wales and its three Enablers, the Enabling Adult, Effective Environments, and Engaging Experiences which emphasise sensitive observation, responsive pedagogy, and child-initiated learning (Welsh Government, 2022).

Self-chosen spontaneous play offers a more accurate picture of children's capabilities than adult-directed activities, the practitioner's role is to act as an enabling presence: observing closely, supporting safety, and using descriptive rather than directive language. This mirrors Playwork principles (Sturrock & Else, 2005), which emphasise sensitive, non-intrusive adult involvement to preserve children's agency and the integrity of the play cycle. By stepping back and allowing play to unfold without interference, practitioners ensure that observations capture authentic learning and behaviour rather than compliance or performance.

This is evident in during the free-flow play of a four-year-old at a childminder setting. The child chooses blocks and independently begins constructing a tower for all the animals. In this spontaneous activity he sorts blocks by size, tests stability, adapts the structure when it wobbles, and creates a narrative to accompany the play. These behaviours provide a highly accurate reflection of the child's developmental stage because, as Piaget (1962) argues, children reveal their genuine thinking and problem-solving abilities when engaged in self-initiated, hands-on activities rather than adult directed tasks. Similarly, Vygotsky (1966) highlights that in imaginative, voluntary play, children often perform at their highest developmental level, demonstrating skills such as symbolic thinking, emotional regulation and persistence that may not surface in structured situations. The childminders sensitive observation of the child's spatial reasoning, problem solving, use of language and resilience

captures authentic learning because he is acting from intrinsic motivation, not adult expectation.

Had the childminder instead instructed the child to 'copy my tower' he would likely have shifted into compliance, showing imitation and listening rather than creativity or independent reasoning. This would interrupt the natural Play Cycle, replacing his play cue and flow with the adult's own agenda, resulting in an observation that reflects adult direction rather than his true capabilities (Sturrock & Else, 2005).

However, when observing children in natural self-directed play children can become aware they are being observed, their engagement can often become less spontaneous and more performative, reducing the accuracy of the observation. Instead of acting on their own ideas and motivations, children may begin to behave in ways they believe the adult wants to see (Louis, 2023). To minimise this, practitioners can build observation into everyday routines, so it feels familiar and non-intrusive, allowing children to return quickly to authentic play. Using strategies such as stepping back physically, observing from the periphery of the play space or using video observation can help maintain natural engagement (Louis, 2023).

Observation bias in a keyworker system can be a common occurrence because a single practitioner repeatedly observes and interprets a child's behaviour through their own expectations and experiences, making them more vulnerable to cognitive biases such as familiarity bias, where long term knowledge shapes what they notice; the halo effect, where an overall positive or negative impression influences how all subsequent behaviours are interpreted; and confirmation bias, where practitioners unconsciously look for behaviours that support their existing beliefs (Bruce, Louis & McCall, 2014).

Minimising observation bias relies on unobtrusive, objective, sensitive observation of children in their self-chosen play, allowing their genuine capabilities to emerge without distortion from adult presence, assumptions or intervention (Louis, 2023).

Reference List

Bergen, D. (2001) *Pretend play and young children's development*. ERIC Digest. Champaign, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education. Available at:

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED458045.pdf> (Accessed: 15 February 2026).

Berk, L.E. (2022) 'Role of make-believe in children's development', *MethodSpace*. Available at:

<https://collegepublishing.sagepub.com/instructors/instructor-communities/berk/role-of-make-believe-in-children's-development> (Accessed: 15 February 2026).

Boss, C. (2024) 'Learning stories and children's rights: Reimagining assessment in early childhood education', *International Journal of Human Rights Education*, Article 11. Available at: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1446977.pdf> (Accessed: 11 February 2026).

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979) *The Ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bruce, T., Louis, S. and McCall, G. (2014) *Observing young children*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Bruner, J. (1966) *Toward a theory of instruction*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Carr, M. and Lee, W. (2012) *Learning stories: Constructing learner identities in early education*. London: SAGE.

Carr, M., May, H., Podmore, V.N., Cubey, P., Hatherly, A. and Macartney, B. (2024) *Learning and teaching stories: Action research on evaluation in early childhood education*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research. Available at:

<https://www.nzcer.org.nz/research/publications/learning-and-teaching-stories-action-research-evaluation-early-childhood-educa> (Accessed: 09 February 2026).

Child Development Institute (n.d.) *Play is the work of the child – Maria Montessori*.

Available at: <https://childdevelopmentinfo.com/child-development/play-work-of-children/> (Accessed: 11 February 2026).

Devi, A., Fleeer, M. and Li, L. (2021) 'Preschool teachers' pedagogical positioning in relation to children's imaginative play', *Early Child Development and Care*, 191(16), pp. 2471–2483. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2020.1717479>.

Early Years Alliance (2024) 'New research highlights the worsening workforce crisis in the early years sector'. Available at: <https://www.eyalliance.org.uk/news-events/news/new-research-highlights-worsening-workforce-crisis-early-years-sector/> (Accessed: 11 January 2026).

Early Years TV (n.d.) *Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of cognitive development – and the zone of proximal development (ZPD)*. Available at: <https://www.earlyyears.tv/vygotsky-sociocultural-cognitive-development-zpd/> (Accessed: 15 February 2026).

Fisher, J. (2016) *Interacting or interfering? Improving interactions in the early years*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Froebel, F. (2005) *The Kindergarten: A child's garden of play*. New York: Dover Publications. (Original work published 1840).

Goldschmied, E. and Jackson, S. (2004) *People under three: Young children in day care*. 2nd edn. London: Routledge. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203511381>.

Hwb (2025) *Early childhood play, learning and care in Wales*. Available at: <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/early-childhood-play-learning-and-care-in-wales/>.

Jakobsen, K.V. and Fischer, P. (2025) *Child and adolescent development: A topical approach* (2nd ed.). VIVA Open Publishing. Available at: <https://viva.pressbooks.pub/topicalchilddev/> (Accessed: 10 February 2026).

James, L. (2026) *Personal observation A: Unpublished case study*.

James, L. (2026) *Personal observation B: Unpublished case study*.

Lillard, A.S., Lerner, M.D., Hopkins, E.J., Dore, R.A., Smith, E.D. and Palmquist, C.M. (2013) 'The impact of pretend play on children's development: A review of the evidence', *Psychological Bulletin*, 139(1), pp. 1–34. doi:10.1037/a0029321.

Lindon, J. (2010) *Understanding child development: Linking theory and practice*. 2nd edn. London: Hodder Education.

Louis, S. (2022) *Observing learning in early childhood*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Louis, S. (2023) *Observing learning in early childhood*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Ministry of Education (2017) *Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa – Early Childhood Curriculum*. Wellington: Ministry of Education. Available at: <https://tewhariki.tki.org.nz/assets/Key-documents/Files/Te-Whariki-Early-Childhood-Curriculum.pdf> (Accessed: 15 February 2026).

Muentener, P., Herrig, E. and Schulz, L. (2018) 'The efficiency of infants, exploratory play is related to longer-term cognitive development', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, Article 635. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00635> (Accessed: 12 February 2026).

Nation.Cymru (2025) 'Reporting on childcare funding sustainability in Wales'. Available at: <https://nation.cymru> (Accessed: 15 January 2026).

Nutbrown, C. (2012) *Foundations for quality: The independent review of early education and childcare qualifications*. London: Department for Education. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a74af28ed915d0e8e39a315/Nutbrown-Review.pdf>.

Parten, M. (1932) 'Social participation among preschool children', *Journal of abnormal and social psychology*, 27(3), pp. 243–269.

Piaget, J. (1962) *Play, dreams and imitation in childhood*. New York: Norton.

Play Wales (n.d.) *Play sufficiency*. Available at: <https://play.wales/play-policy-legislation/play-sufficiency> (Accessed: 15 February 2026).

Play Wales (2025) *Playing outdoors in early years settings – Toolkit*. Available at: <https://play.wales/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Playing-outdoors-in-early-years-settings-%E2%80%93-toolkit.pdf>

Play Wales (2026) *Right to play*. Available at: <https://play.wales/play/right-to-play/> (Accessed: 11 February 2026).

Smilansky, S. (1968) *The effects of sociodramatic play on disadvantaged preschool children.*

Stewart, S., MacDonald, N. and Waters Davies, J. (2025) *Early childhood education in Wales: Policy, Promises and Practice realities.* University of Wales Trinity Saint David. Available at: <https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/news/fragmentation-and-policy-practice-early-childhood-education-wales> (Accessed: 10 February 2026).

Sturrock, G. and Else, P. (2005) *Therapeutic Playwork: Play and Playwork theory.* Sheffield: Ludic Press.

Sturrock, G. and Else, P. (2005) *The play cycle: Revisited.* London: PlayEducation.

The Education Hub (2020) *How to use learning stories in ECE assessment.* Available at: <https://cdn.theeducationhub.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/How-to-use-learning-stories-in-ECE-assessment.pdf> (Accessed: 12 February 2026).

Vygotsky, L.S. (1966) 'Play and its role in the mental development of the child', *Soviet Psychology*, 5(3), pp. 6–18.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978) *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Waters, J. (ed.) (2022) *Introduction to play.* Los Angeles: SAGE.

Welsh Assembly Government (2002) *Play policy.* Available at: <https://www.a-better.wales/pages/play-wales/pages/resources/WAG-play-policy-2002.pdf> (Accessed: 15 February 2026).

Welsh Government (2021) *The additional learning needs code for Wales 2021.* Cardiff: Welsh Government.

Welsh Government (2022) *A Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings.* Available at: <https://hwb.gov.wales/api/storage/1f581142-6b91-41e4-845d-3d6c7765df20/a-curriculum-for-funded-non-maintained-nursery-settings.pdf> (Accessed: 15 February 2026).

Welsh Government (2022) *Curriculum for funded non maintained nursery settings.*

Welsh Government (2022) *Early childhood play, learning and care: Developmental pathways 0 to 3*. Available at:

<https://hwb.gov.wales/api/storage/56774946-48aa-4fab-adda-f27508d8dc8f/early-childhood-play-learning-and-care-developmental-pathways-0-to-3.pdf> (Accessed: 11 February 2026).

Welsh Government (2023) *Assessment arrangements for funded non maintained nursery settings*. Available at:

<https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/curriculum-and-assessment-arrangements-for-funded-non-maintained-nursery-settings/assessment-arrangements-for-funded-non-maintained-nursery-settings> (Accessed: 15 February 2026).

Welsh Government (2024) *Early childhood play, learning and care plan in Wales*. Available at: <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2024-03/early-childhood-play-learning-care-plan.pdf>

Welsh Government (2025) *Wales a play friendly country: Statutory Guidance*. Available at: <https://www.gov.wales/wales-play-friendly-country> (Accessed: 09 February 2026).

Zacher, J.C. (2008) 'Vygotsky's Legacy: A Foundation for research and practice', *Language Arts*, 86(1), pp. 67–68.