

For this assignment I will be uploading the following:

1. Discuss two types of play and how these can be supported in practice.
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.
3. In depth discussion and understanding of an observation method for young children
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.

I confirm that I have used AI (Gemini) to help organise my reference list into alphabetical order

I have copies of my previous list.

“Play is the highest expression of human development in childhood for it alone is the free expression of what is in a child’s soul.” (Froebel Trust, 2020)

Play can represent itself in a variety of forms, one of these forms is outdoor play.

Waters-Davies (2022) explains how outdoor play can take place in many ways on many different surfaces, from the beach to a playground to a forest, as long as it is in the outdoor environment. However, the play that is achieved will have different outcomes when it takes place in different areas. Such as, play that takes place in the forest offers more natural items, twigs, pebbles and leaves, all these offer limitless opportunities with multiple uses, leading to a deeper level of play where children use creativity and imagination. Whereas playing on a playground could potentially have more fixed items or single use toys that are used in a specific way offering limited play skills.

There are numerous benefits to the outdoor environment, Tovey (2017) explains that there are multiple benefits and learning opportunities in the outdoor environment particularly the opportunity for purposeful holistic development that meets all areas of the curriculum. She then goes on to say how environments should support potential, as this is where imagination grows, curiosities can be explored and there are opportunities for creativity skills to be investigated. This is supported by Welsh Assembly Government,(2011) where it has been discussed about the importance of the outdoors in supporting children's learning and understanding, through playful exploration, and creating an environment where children feel they are able to be quiet and observe but also having areas for children to be loud and creative.

According to Louie (2022) Froebel loved nature and believed children deserved the chance to engage with the outdoors, with nature and all it has to offer. She continues to explain how holistic development is achieved by children accessing and playing in the outdoor environment, taking control and owning their play and having access to nature, she believed this could not be segregated and all learning is naturally done without thought. She led us on to see that children repeat the same forms and patterns of play and this is where a schema is established, allowing the children the opportunity to practice their findings over and over again, enabling them to make sense of the world around them and how links are made.

While Froebelian theory is holistic, with children learning through first hand experiences and all forms of children's worlds come together. However, The University of Nottingham (n.d) shows a contrasting argument and suggests that Piaget's theory states that children explore the world in a solitary manner as a lone scientist and lacks emphasis on emotional and social skills.

In addition to outdoor play being holistic, block play is also considered to be holistic, Spry (2020) argues that block play is one of the most holistic forms of play that exists for children. There is emphasis on wooden blocks and particularly the unit block. He believed that many forms of learning take place without children even being aware that they are doing so, from measuring, communicating, working out weights and symmetry, there are all kinds of learning being taken place simply through playing with blocks. Spry (2020) continues to explain that block play has the power to bring children together even those with the littlest language skills, and describes block play as speaking for itself, with children visually seeing what others are doing and recognising that they too can participate with someone who is building blocks up to make a tower or lengthways to build a pathway, during this period it allows social interactions where new vocabulary can be exchanged and learned.

Whilst experts such as spry (2020) speak highly of block play and the benefits to children, Johansson (2025) shares how this has been an important element of practice since kindergarten in the 1930's. Johansson explains how wooden blocks were essential in providing free play and structure, allowing children to express their freedom through constructive materials in Swedish kindergartens.

As previously discussed, block play supports children's learning in all forms. For children to be able to achieve the best learning outcome block play needs to belong. It needs to be accessible with space and stocked with quality blocks, for children to use their imaginations and immerse themselves in their creations, whether this be solitary or working with peers. (Armstrong,2022) Armstrong also lists the stages of block play, explaining the progression of development and the enhancement of skills that children will establish through continuous access to block play.

To summarise both outdoor play and block play offer opportunity for holistic development for children in the early years. With quality environments and knowledgeable practitioners to

support. Both types of play are deeply connected to Froebelian theories, interlinking with elements of the outdoors being used to support the loose part play that could be used to enhance block play throughout the setting.

This leads us on to think about self-directed play and the importance of children leading their play and learning.

According to Play Adventures (n.d) self-directed play is play that is completely controlled by children. Children lead in initiative and determine their own rules, directing their play in any which way they see fit. This type of play is 'intrinsically motivated' a deep need within them, a deep desire they need to fulfil. Steiner (2022) agrees and explains that children will be seen to be completely immersed in their play, and this will be witnessed by observers. During this time, it is likely practitioners and parents see children indulge in fantasy play and take on the role of characters during their play, switching between roles. Berkshire Montessori (2020) further explains how loose parts support self-directed play with children accessing items that allow endless opportunities and learning outcomes instead of play being limited to items that have predicted outcomes.

According to Juster (2015) self-directed play offers opportunity for problem solving and learning about the world around them. Allowing children to practice and navigate their way of thinking and giving them the confidence to try and get it wrong and try again, navigating new routes and deepening their learning. Juster (2015) then continues to explain that children may not always have the opportunity for self-directed play as they are given no 'down time' which would present opportunity for this to naturally happen. It's recommended to keep the 'four key P.L.A.Y ideas' in mind, thinking about **permission**, encouraging children to participate in self-directed play, letting them know it is okay and allocating the time for them to do this, **loose parts**-providing materials that have endless learning and exploratory opportunities, **a safe space**- a space where children are able to fully immerse themselves, allowing the messy play to take place and providing a space where children feel safe to explore and experiment confidently, and finally, **you**- being nearby to support when needed and accepting invitations to play. This is agreed by (UNICEF, n.d.).

The Lego foundation (2022) argues that self-directed play is essential for children as it supports cognitive development, providing opportunity for children to learn problem solving

skills and have agency over their play. This means a deeper learning, more in depth, with children willing and keen to participate as it is intrinsically within them, it brings them joy and they find it rewarding, ensuring a sense of belonging and building confidence and self-esteem, supporting further development and further life skills. However, it is also argued that self-directed play alone is not enough, the role of the facilitator is needed to support the children's learning and intervene, when necessary, such as having an invitation or during guided play. During guided play the facilitator is a stepping stone between self-directed play and play with instruction, meaning that they are taking the role of a participator rather than a leader. Adults are required to be attuned to the child during this play.

Education Endowment Foundation (2023) explains the importance of effective scaffolding and how the quality of the interactions and input of practitioners help to expand the children's learning. Ensuring the adult is not taking over the play but extending the children's learning, ensuring they reach the zone of proximal development. (The Open University, n.d.)

This approach links closely to the curriculum for Wales; between the enabling adult and engaging experiences as they are both necessary for supporting children's creativity and exploration and supporting belonging. Practitioners ensure play remains meaningful, allowing children the space to explore and take the lead on their play whilst having the adult nearby to facilitate when needed.

All children have the right to play Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland, (n.d.). however, this is not always the case, there are circumstances where some are not able to access play. Considering Maslow's hierarchy of needs, if some children are not having their basic level of needs met then they are not able to move forward and achieve the next stage of development. If a child is hungry or tired, then they will struggle to feel motivated and interested in play and building self-esteem through self-directed play. Self-directed play takes place when a child can fully immerse themselves within play, with the distraction of basic needs not being fulfilled this can be unlikely to happen for some children.

Waters-Davies (2022) explains how some practices use play as a reward, allowing children to play after completing certain tasks or meeting certain demands. These comments are said to promote positive behaviours and to gain structure within settings, however it goes against the

law that is in place to support the rights of the child about play. Play should be seen as learning, as for children, it is the highest form of learning.

According to Froebel Trust (2020). Observation is a skill used to deeply watch, notice and listen to children during their play. During observation, practitioners will be able to notice the likes and interests of the child, find out what motivates the child and what captures their imagination. The evidence collated and reflected upon will support children's development. Froebel believed that play is such a vital part of child development and believed that children needed to be closely observed by adults during play to ensure that their thought processes could be understood, allowing practitioners to offer support when needed to help a child progress in their development.

Research by (Welsh Government (2022). suggests that the notice, analyse and respond framework helps to guide practitioners away from a tick boxing technique and encourages practitioners to watch and notice the interests and fascinations of children in a more natural way, as they play and interact with the world around them. They are then able to analyse their findings, discovering what the children are doing and why they are doing it and use this information to support further planning, scaffolding the children, furthering their knowledge and learning.

During the respond phase practitioners consider the next steps in supporting children's learning and development. During this period practitioners should consider their level of engagement and whether this helps to enhance children's development or whether it is more of a distraction, as well as remembering children need time to wallow and define their play with few unnecessary interruptions. (Welsh Government, 2022, p. 5).

There are some considerations that need to be made when looking at the notice, analyse and respond form of observation. Attachments that are formed between children and their key workers are important for the growth of children, offering a safe space, allowing the children to feel confident to explore and discover the world around them (Department for Education, 2024) however, if this form of observation is being used in the early years, there could be an element of unconscious bias. Over time, the feelings formed could overshadow the truth; emotions could fill in the gaps of reality, meaning that fair judgements are not always being made although its unintentional. (Louis and Betteridge, 2020)

A strength of using notice, analyse and respond is that it comes away from a tick list that primarily is used for collecting large amounts of data, instead it looks at the child's learning at the stage they are at and encourages practitioners to put next steps in place to enhance development. Going back to 'wallowing' this form of observation gives children the time they need to fully immerse and understand what they are learning, confirming what they know before being enhancing the learning. (Department of education 2023)

However, a common criticism is that this type of observation could be time consuming and has the potential to take the attention away from children and less time is spent playing and communicating and more time completing paperwork.

When observing in the early years, it could be suggested that only keyworker practitioners carrying out observations on their keyworker children may leave some discrepancies in children's development as not all practitioners see things in the same way. For example, one practitioner might identify a **transporting schema** as a child moves blocks in a pram, focusing on their physical coordination, whereas another may notice a **trajectory schema** as the child observes the blocks falling, focusing on their understanding of gravity. Department for Education (2017) pg. 9 argues that staff discussions regarding observation provide better outcomes for future planning. These staff discussions could be done in a variety of ways and documented to support further planning.

Within flying start practitioners work together to journal every session, encouraging all staff members to contribute to discussions and share observations on all children. This ensures a holistic and fair observation being made for all children. From doing this, evidence suggests that some children may frequently be being observed, as they could be a more dominant member of the group, and there could be other children that need observing and encouraged to access other areas of the setting to help further their skills and build confidence in new areas.

"Children have the right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other leisure activities" Commissioner for Children and Young People Scotland, (n.d). Play is the basis for learning and development for children especially in the early years of life. During this period babies and children are learning about the world around them, building their skill set and exploring all developmental areas. This leads to a greater sense of self-esteem and supports children's wellbeing. (Play. Wales, 2026)

Laevers, (2005) uses the Leuven scale to measure the quality of engagement that the children show during their play. Through using this scale practitioners are able to see the deepness of the engagement and concentration shown in play, when the child moves up the scale towards the highest level it is likely the child has reached the point of wallowing in their play where they are completely immersed and engrossed in all that they are doing. This is the point in which play is at its richest and observers gain the best observations. Practitioners can notice the true ability of the child. However, if this is not the case and children had not reached the point of wallowing, their engagement would be surface level with the child being less engrossed or focused, leading to less accurate observations.

Similarly, Gray (2013) explains that free play is where children learn skills for life, developing socially and emotionally and overcoming problems. Play therefore, appears to be a significant part of childhood, supporting children to develop holistically. It could be argued that during play is the best time for children to be observed as there is a range of learning happening and it is at a time where the children interest is being shown giving opportunity for future planning.

Brodie (2014) states that observing young people is an important factor in the early years as it provides opportunities to fully understand the level of learning happening, however, it could also be argued that during observations children and young people present themselves differently when they are being watched by practitioners. Williams, (2017) potentially leading to inaccuracies in observations. Williams (2017) continues to explain other forms of bias, such as observers bias, explaining the influence practitioners could have over the observations if they are observing with a particular outcome in mind. Observation methods such as the notice analyse and respond The Welsh government (2022) could be considered to combat this kind of bias as it allows practitioners the time to analyse and respond appropriately, ensuring they are able to observe at a deeper level and find the richness in the observations. The Welsh Government (2022, p. 5) discusses practitioners' opportunity for group discussions, explaining how shared understanding help can help all practitioners with learning and development opportunities for children, further supporting children's assessments. However, there can be some issues with this, during the working day there can be limited opportunities for practitioners to collectively share observations from that day, staff members can work different schedules and this can mean not all practitioners have opportunity to share or they could miss information also.

Through regular observations practitioners can analyse the level of learning that children are at. They are able to find the zone of proximal development where children are content with learning, this can then be used to offer challenges to support further development helping to scaffold their learning. (Webster, 2025)

The role of the practitioner during observation can play a big part in the quality of the observation and the quality of the play being observed. As the Froebel trust (2022) suggests that the observer should be internally active and externally passive. Taking in everything that goes on around them, paying attention when observing and taking in the small details, learning how and why children do what they do and what their goal is, all whilst knowing when to interject and waiting for an invitation to play.

To conclude, Practitioners having an in-depth knowledge of children's learning ensures observations are carried out accurately and practitioner input happens when it is necessary, without interjecting and causing distractions potentially cutting play short. The Lueven scale enables practitioners to observe in depth and really get to know the child, zoning in on their levels of engagement. without children accessing self-directed play at high, engaging levels, it is unlikely practitioners would have rich observations to evidence and document, without these observations it could be difficult to create rich learning opportunities and support children to reach their full potential.

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