participate in enough play. The main aspects under discussion include: children from disadvantaged backgrounds, a brief summary of the education sector, environmental stressors and also screen based play looking into both the advantages and disadvantages.

There have been so many different attempts to try and define and characterize play but this proves a difficult task one example of a definition includes: play is what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way and for their own reasons (Anon., 2014). Play has also been described as what children do when they are not being told what to do by an adult. Vygotsky (1967) defined play as a kind of mental support system which enables children to represent their social reality (Penn, 2005). He believes that play provides more leeway to think and act in completed ways. A simple reason for why children spend much of their time playing is because they learn a great deal from it. Albert Bandura a social learning theorist stated that children will observe and copy adults then put what they observed into their play, this is commonly known as reinforced behaviours (Davenport, 1988). Many studies have illustrated that a variety of playful activities have a strong influence on a child’s development: intellectually, socially, physically and mentally (Berger, 2015).

There has been a tremendous amount of research into the benefits of play not only for children but for families and the community, research has shown that children who engage in positive playful activities have good levels of self-awareness and self-esteem, good physical and mental health, promotes opportunities for developing good social skills and sensible risk taking (Anon., 2014). Play is an essential element to the social, cognitive, emotional and physical development for children. It is a natural tool for most children to gain resilience a way of learning how to cooperate, negotiate with others and also overcome challenges (Milligan, 2011). In addition to that statement, play also offers opportunities for some parents to see the world from the perspective of their child if they engage in play together. It could very well be argued that active and physical play is so much at the centre of most children’s development that it should be included in the definition of childhood. Play offers so much more than most people realise, it allows children to gain a sense of creativity and a good imagination (Milligan, 2011). Psychologists have recognised that there are five main types of play which make up play as a whole, these include: symbolic play, physical play, play with objects socio dramatic play and games with rules (Whitebread, 2012), all of these types of play will be mentioned within this report. Although this report is not going to discuss the biology of play it is important to note that play does contribute to healthy brain development for children who engage in a decent amount of play.

The historical and sociological research surrounding children’s play shows that play is ubiquitous within human society, research also shows that play is largely supported by parents and adults across all cultures. Archaeological and cross cultural research highlights the prevalence of games and play since prehistoric times widely supported by equipment
there has been a recent trend towards this type of therapy, and it has been widely accepted as a way of helping to treat all different types of issues in children such as: grieving children and children with disabilities (Lindon, 2001). Although there are many benefits related with play therapy there have also been some criticisms made, for example: its argued by Dix (2013) that play therapy needs more empirical research in order to gain significant credibility within the field of psychology. Interpretations may also be different from therapist to therapist therefore it could be argued that play therapy is not 100% reliable (Dix, 2013).

Experimental studies are limited due to considerations of ethical issues. For example it would be highly unethical to traumatize a child just to find a difference in play. However some psychologists have developed clever ideas to get around the problem. Barnett (1994) used the experience of a child’s first day at school as it was a naturally occurring situation. The results of this study show a clear link between pretend play and reducing levels of anxiety (Willan, 2007). Warren et al (2000) investigated whether the anxieties expressed in play of 35 five years olds corresponded with anxiety related behaviour. This study showed that analysing play can be a good indicator for likely anxiety related problems later in life (Willan, 2007). These studies show clear correlation that play is a very important aspect within a child’s developing life, especially when it comes to developing emotionally. This statement is very supportive for Freud’s approach (Lillemyre, 2009). Research within the field of play and psychology it has been established that there are five main types of human play, these include: physical play, symbolic play, play with objects, socio-dramatic play and also games with rules (Whitebread, 2012). Each of these different types of play supports a variety of both emotional and cognitive development in children. Some of the specified play types have more supportive research than others therefore there is still a need for empirical evidence concerning the psychological processes involved with child’s play (Whitebread, 2012).

Within the next chapter the main discussion will be centred around the social benefits children gain from a variety of different types of play. The main theorists included in the following chapter are Smilansky (1990) and Parten (1933) and the overall emphasis will be on socio dramatic play.
Discussion

There are two main aspects which are known to dramatically influence the extent to which a child is playful, these aspects consist of environmental and social factors which could either support or inhibit children’s playfulness (Whitebread, 2012). Within today’s modern society children’s rights and opportunities for play may be reduced by particular environmental stressors, for example the separation from nature for instance not having a garden or outdoor play area, having a risk averse society and also tensions within the educational sector. The current tensions within the educational sector are a relevant factor as over the past twenty years the specific curriculum for early and primary education has been overly prescribed by the government. Which had avowed the value of learning through different types of play, however it is very much limited to children under the age of 6. For example Chudakoff (2007) has stated that there has been a sharp decline in children’s free play especially with other children (Whitebread, 2012).

Other factors impact children’s play for example varying attitudes towards different genders, when there is a major separation between male adults and “female roles” young boys and girls often end up with very gendered play, with boys being physical and dangerous and girls being more domestic pretending to clean and cook. Evidence on the subject of children engaging in little or no play is very rare as it would be unethical to conduct such experiments on children, therefore the evidence supporting this is based on experiments on animals however there is obvious case studies available such as the story of Genie who was deprived of basically everything. There have been many studies done on deprived children and their play experiences, for example Romanian orphans who were kept in deprived circumstances found it extremely difficult to learn to play once adopted and in a loving family (Chugani, 2001). Studies have been undertaken where play is introduced in an orphanage, the results were positive, the children scored higher levels of motor skills and better cognitive and social functioning (Chugani, 2001).

Davenport (1988); Jarvis (2001); Pen (2005) puts forward a major concern especially with children from more urbanised or disadvantaged backgrounds that they may not engage in a sufficient amount of outdoor play due to different aspects such: lack of or no gardens or nearby play areas, concerns around safety issues and also basic lack of opportunity. Outdoor play is a very important aspect of childhood it supports aspects such as: self-regulation, independence and resourcefulness (Whitebread, 2012). Veitch (2006) expresses another concern for children living in modernised urban societies may be that yes they live in a supportive household but primary carers such as: teachers, carers, parents and family members perceive the environment in a dangerous way and not suitable for children picking out dangers and hazards and again being over protective.

Past research suggests that more modernised societies often result in children having a heavy schedule which means less time to play especially free play where the child can be
your child’s development” but usually the case is that these toys are the most expensive. Parents who may not be able to afford market driven materials may get the feeling of disempowerment when it comes to playing with their children (Milligan, 2011). On the other hand other theorists have argues that children growing up in poverty or slightly more disadvantaged communities often develop better creativity skills than other more advantaged children due to playing with low cost or homemade toys such as: blocks, beads, reading books and less accessibility to technology (Milligan, 2011). According to Milligan (2011) children who do not engage in much outdoor play, exploration play or physical activity tend to spend a vast amount of time playing video games, watching television or listening to music which is usually time spend with no social activity and in complete isolation.

Since Space invaders was released into the public in 1979 there has been a rapid rise in children spending their free time using computer games, this is usually related to children mainly boys aged between nine and fifteen (Goldstein, 1994). It’s fair to say that it’s important to bring up the subject of screen based play in this section of the report. It is clear to see that we currently live in a digital or technological society therefore some argue that video games, tablets, computers and phones are a huge part of children’s lives living in the 21st century. However according to Louv (2005); Singer (2012); and Whitebread (2012) evidence supports the notion that time spend engaging in screen based play is largely at the expense of playing outdoors or with other children although others argue that the decline in outdoor play is actually the result of parent’s fear about today’s society as mentioned earlier. There is extensive research from Vrombort (2014); Marsh (2010); McPake and Stephan (2013) about the advantages and disadvantages of screen time for young child, for example excessive screen time spent alone in early childhood has been said to bring with it many disadvantages especially, in the cases where it takes out and limits the development of other play skills. There has been a link made between obesity and problems in socializing in later life with children who spend too much time play screen games (Whitebread, 2012). The AAP policy on media education presented research which shows a clear link between screen time and negative behaviour and also lack of physical activity, some of the negative aspects in relation to extensive screen time in children include: anxiety, depression, aggression, poor academic performance, nightmares and night terrors and also earlier sexual behaviour (Milligan, 2011).

Some experts within the field have also stated that there are a variety of benefits with screen based play. For instance reaction time appears to be quicker in children who play physical video games. Within some clinical studies various video games have been of great help when it came to children’s compliance to medical treatments, it lessened the trauma of having to have invasive treatment which meant less psychological damage for the child (Whitebread, 2012). Another advantage of screen based games it that in a way it could bring a family together, there is some evidence that well designed videogames can enhance and enrich resources for children and their families (Whitebread, 2012). When approaching the