

Playful Pedagogy

A guide to getting started

September 2020 | Play Scotland Toolkit
Dr Jamie Hamilton and Dr Jenny Wood

“We know how babies and children learn best. They learn best in an environment of quality interactions, interesting spaces and when the experiences on offer are set in meaningful contexts. They learn best in environments that inspire them to be curious and creative.”

Realising the Ambition, Education Scotland



**Scotland's
Play Strategy**
Valuing play, every day



Foreword

“We want Scotland to be the best place to grow up, a nation which values play as a life-enhancing daily experience for all our children and young people, in their homes, early learning and childcare, schools and communities.

All children have a right to play; play is vital for children’s development, health and wellbeing and it is reflected in Scotland’s curriculum.

It encourages problem solving and working together at a young age and promotes independence and autonomy for the teenage years.

Children’s play is crucial to Scotland’s wellbeing; socially, economically and environmentally. Children learn as they play and bringing more play into the school day helps foster children’s natural curiosity and motivation to learn.”



Maree Todd, MSP
Minister for Children and Young People

“We hope this resource is helpful to you on your Playful Learning Adventure. Please contribute to practice across Scotland by using #playfulschools in order to record and share what you are doing. By sharing effective practice and good ideas we can fully Realise the Ambition for Scotland’s children.”



Marguerite Hunter Blair
CEO Play Scotland

Introduction

Playful learning indoors and outdoors is a part of Scotland’s [Curriculum for Excellence](#), much-valued by early years practitioners, teachers and sector partners, as well as children. [Active Learning in the Early Years](#) (2007), [Building the Ambition](#) (2014) and [Realising the Ambition: Being Me](#) (2020) all recognise the need for children to have a curriculum that ensures sufficient time for children to play uninterrupted. This document aims to support and underpin Realising the Ambition: Being Me and to embed a consistent, qualitative approach to play pedagogy that will deliver the practices and benefits of a kindergarten stage.

The play sector also has a significant role in developing resources to support early years practitioners in developing effective practice to support children’s learning through play. Play Scotland has recently produced [Playful Pedagogy](#), a practical guide with resources and case studies designed to help introduce and support everyday learning adventures across the school. It makes play experiences central to learning, giving pupils the flexibility to find their own solutions to both new and existing problems. It engages children in personally meaningful activities, learning about themselves and others, and encourages autonomy and motivation.

This evidence based approach to teaching and learning has five aspects which help children flourish: active learning; socially interactive; iterative; joyful; and meaningful.



What is Playful Pedagogy?

Playful Pedagogy is a way of integrating children’s play experiences with curricular learning, giving pupils the flexibility to find their own solutions to both new and existing problems. It engages children in personally meaningful activities, learning about themselves and others, and encourages autonomy and their independent motivation-to-learn.

Learning Adventures

Playful Pedagogy is facilitated by teachers by something we term a “learning adventure”, the goal of which is to enable whole classes, and every individual child within it, to determine their own learning goals and pathways while remaining within the framework of the Early Years Curriculum. When a school takes the whole-team approach to playful pedagogy, this can be a Learning Adventure which involves everyone: pupils, teachers and parents.

Government-endorsed

As well as having an enormous weight of evidence to support it, the approach is strongly endorsed and supported by The Scottish Government’s guidance and priority policy objectives, as articulated in [Realising the Ambition](#) (see key resources).

This resource is for Headteachers, teachers and schools who wish to carry forward this vision of best practice and to teach better, develop their professional skills, and enjoy themselves more along the way.

The resource has three sections:

- **Why Playful Pedagogy** gives an overview of the argument for the approach with links to some key resources, so you can be clear in your head and can explain to others why you are trying it out or intend to implement it as core practice.
- **Getting Started with Playful Pedagogy** provides you with all you need to conduct your first Learning Adventure, and overview, a “how to” and a great case study by a P1 teacher who has been on that journey.
- **Playful Pedagogy across the school** includes key considerations and resources on how to reorient your school culture and systems so as to enable best practice, without overburdening staff, and bringing pupils, teachers and parents on board the journey.

We hope you will find this of use to your practice. Those teachers and schools that ‘dip their toe’ into Playful Pedagogy, never tend to look back.

Why Playful Pedagogy?

Education is about setting our children up for life in the 21st century. Play, meanwhile, is how we naturally make sense of the world and adapt to new situations.

Playful Pedagogy puts play experience as central to learning, giving pupils the flexibility to find their own solutions to both new and existing problems. It engages children in personally meaningful activities, learning about themselves and others, and encourages autonomy and motivation.

Health and Wellbeing

Play is a foundation of health and wellbeing, linking with all SHANARRI principles. Playful Pedagogy is especially linked with Active, Respected and Responsible as it tends to be more active than traditional approaches, gives children a chance to direct their own learning, and also to try out different roles and responsibilities. It helps link education with all aspects of the GIRFEC ‘My World Triangle’.



The Four Capacities

Playful Pedagogy fits neatly with the Scottish Government's four capacities:

1 | Successful Learners

Closing the attainment gap is a policy priority, and lack of play has been linked with poorer educational outcomes. Evidence shows the relationship between meaning and perception, developed through play, both underpins and contributes to formal learning and attentional development. P1-P3 spans a critical stage where through play, children develop the ability to think, reflect and reason, separately from the world of objects around them.

2 | Confident Individuals

Social Determination Theory demonstrates that our confidence grows through tasks which support our autonomy, enable personally meaningful activity, and help us feel connected to others. Playful Pedagogy enables all of these as part of the formal learning process.

3 | Responsible Citizens

Psychological theories tell us that play is fundamental to the development of social skills, perspective-taking, empathy, and understanding of social/cultural rules. Playful Pedagogy helps us understand our own and other people's responsibilities.

4 | Effective Contributors

Through Playful Pedagogy children learn to collaborate and cooperate with one another; this positive interdependence promotes learning and motivation. It has a particularly strong effect on children in need of additional support and works best when it involves pupils with adults and wider communities.

The adolescent can reason abstractly and think in hypothetical terms

Formal operational (12 years-adult)

The child is developing their ability to think and reason separately from the world of objects, and thus, become able to add and subtract

Concrete operational (7-12 years)

Through play and embodied experience, the child is developing the ability to use concepts and symbols to represent objects, and to take another's perspective

Preoperational (2-6 years)

The infant is exploring the world through movement and direct sensory contact but cannot think separately from the world of objects

Sensorimotor (0-2 years)

Learning for Sustainability

"Learning for Sustainability is a cross-curricular approach to creating coherent, rewarding and transformative learning experiences. It's all about learners, educators, schools and their wider communities building a socially-just, sustainable and equitable society. It supports an effective whole-school and community approach by weaving together global citizenship, sustainable development education, and outdoor learning."

Learning for Sustainability Webpage
Education Scotland

Through Playful Pedagogy, pupils engage in wide-ranging projects, learning about themselves, others, the place they live and their contribution to society now and in the future. It is very effective in aiding understanding of human rights, as embedded in the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and Rights Respecting Schools aims. For instance, through Playful Pedagogy, pupils are automatically introduced to Experience & Outcome (E&O) SOC 1-18a:

I have participated in decision making and have considered the different options available in order to make decisions.

Playful Pedagogy can be used as part of a wider, curriculum-embedded task that incorporates Learning for Sustainability and a variety of Social Studies E & Os. The Auchtertool Case study on page 22 of this resource illustrates this.



Getting Started with Playful Pedagogy

Playful Pedagogy entails an endless and satisfying journey of discovery, which for many practitioners is about true teaching. A helpful metaphor for thinking about it is **A Learning Adventure**.

The goal of the adventure is to facilitate experiences which enable your class, and every individual child within it, to determine their own learning goals and pathways while remaining within the CfE framework.

Before starting, it's important to familiarise yourself with the two main threads you will be weaving in:

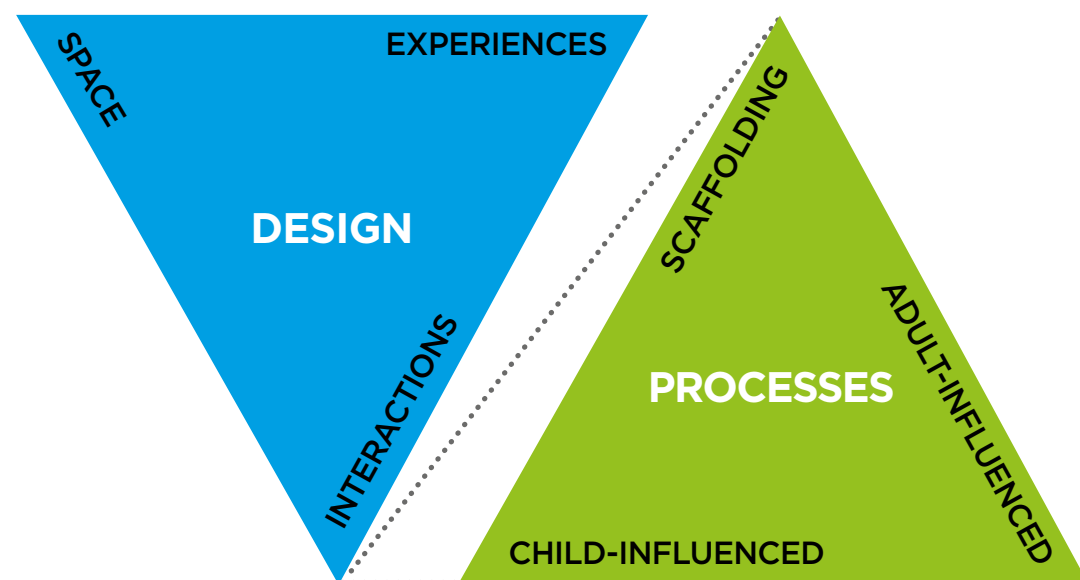
1 | The unique needs, capacities and interests of your pupils.

2 | All Stages 0-1 CfE experiences and outcomes.

Designing your first Learning Adventure

Here is a figure and some overarching questions which provide a tool for thinking and reflecting on the design of your first adventure, and on the interactions (i.e. the learning processes) involved.

The Design Triangle is where you start, and the Process Triangle are the learning interactions which occur as your adventure pans out. The "scaffolding" of your experience is what connects the two, i.e. the topic, provocation and challenge that gets your adventure going.



Experiences

What CfE E&Os could provide a motivating topic, provocation and challenge for an open-ended learning adventure (or vice versa)?

Some E&Os already mention play, others that involve words such as 'create', 'recreate', 'explore', 'experiment' and 'choose' are also ripe candidates.

Spaces

What qualities of the physical setting and materials could enable and support individual motivation, curiosity and creativity during our adventure?

Rich settings (ideally outdoors) have loose materials, which can enable movement, challenge, and imagination, and promote whole-class curiosity and creativity!

Interactions

What learning processes could be involved in the experience, and to what extent will and should the adventure and interactions be influenced by the child, an adult, or by the scaffolding (i.e. the topic, provocation and challenge)?

The first principle of Playful Pedagogy is always to nurture children's capacity to determine their own learning goals and pathways. However, curricular objectives mean interactions necessarily involve a balance between the three.

The following case study and resource provide further detail and insight on first steps to integrating Playful Pedagogy in your teaching practice.



Charlotte Bowes and #Play4P1 Case Study

Background

P1 teacher Charlotte Bowes founded #Play4P1 in March 2020 with colleague Anita Le Tissier. Inspired by the work of Highland Council, she felt Edinburgh needed its own network to encourage dialogue around Playful Pedagogy. From the off, she was surprised at the flood of followers (with over 85 members and counting) and the levels of rich conversation, which demonstrated that she'd tapped into an unmet need.

Starting with the launch of the [#Play4P1 hashtag](#) through her Twitter account, Charlotte has since introduced a [Padlet](#) to share practice around [Education Scotland's vision for early years' Playful Pedagogy](#). With the support of Education Scotland, she is now in the process of collating all of #Play4P1's experiences into a one-stop Google resource for P1 teachers.



Her adventure "down the rabbit hole"

Charlotte first encountered Playful Pedagogy on her 2nd year teaching. Her stage partner was using it as a part of carousel rotations, where children work and play in 15-minute intervals. With the benefit of hindsight, Charlotte now believes this "downtime" was not play at all.

Her "lightbulb moment" was a debrief with her mother where they unpicked her initial belief, having only had a week's experience of play provision during her PGDE, that the carousel breaks were "just letting children play". She then set out to understand what play really was. It has subsequently been 6-years and counting "down the rabbit hole" to gradually transform everything she thought about what constitutes good early years' practice and teaching. Charlotte has written her own blog of her experiences which can be [accessed here](#).

She cites an MEd (Learning and Teaching) project which focused on play as a key influence, and where she became aware of the sheer volume of developmental theory, research and literature which endorses Playful Pedagogy. She warmly welcomes, [Realising the Ambition](#), which she sees as the Scottish Government's validation and endorsement of a play-based approach, finally giving primary schoolteachers everywhere "permission to play."

Why #Play4P1?

Aside from her probation year in P2, Charlotte has only ever taught P1 children. It is a stage where play has a fundamental role in developing cognitive capacities which enable them to take other people's perspectives and think conceptually. A typical P1 class entails a diverse range of competencies and support needs, and evidence shows those first classroom experiences can set the stage for long-term academic success. As a result, it is this year group where it is both most important and difficult to get pedagogy right.



Experiences

Charlotte suggests that planning for Playful Pedagogy should always start with observation of the children and should be responsive to their interests and needs. This can then be extended by picking a related Experience and Outcome (E&O) and developing a provocation which supports a child-led exploration of their learning.

Many schools choose to offer pre-assigned P1 topics with bundled E&Os, which through class discussion, voting (on motivating provocations and challenges) and careful observation can still become child-led. Once the topic is in motion, the teacher can start watching for opportunities to loosely frame and braid in other E&Os for as long as the topic sustains children's interest.

For example, children in Charlotte's class last year talked about a Christmas TV advert opposing the destruction of Indonesian rainforests for palm oil, where an orangutan messes up a child's room. This provided Charlotte with an opportunity to create a topic initiated by the children's interests and linking to multiple E&Os. The next morning, she messed up the classroom before they arrived and began the day with the provocation that the orangutan had visited overnight. The adventure into further learning on the topic started from there.

After honing her craft, Charlotte has moved onto skills-based plans for continuous provision and to observation-based responsive planning in-the-moment. She is now seeking to spread her wings further by exploring topics which are motivating for the children (on an individual basis), but which have no clear curricular frame. Here E&Os from every curricular area are linked through observation and backward reflection. She is excited and determined by the challenge, and the opportunity to further develop her know-how.

Space

For Charlotte, one of the biggest impacts of playful pedagogy has been the improvement of her classroom (and other) learning environments. A key principle is letting the children lead on the development of spaces. For teachers starting out, she recommends the [Play Scotland's Play Types Toolkit](#) as a thinking tool, as it gives guidance on which loose and creative materials enable a range of different types of play.

Interactions

A key theme characterising Charlotte's journey has been learning to let go. She started out with the traditional view of the teacher at the front of the class, with children putting their hands up in response to her questions and following lesson plans to the letter. She now believes that children learn best when they are not just active participants in the teacher's plans but lead the way in their own learning, and so she began gradually affording her class more autonomy. This started with taking away desks and introducing flexible seating and allowing children to vote for tasks and create aspects of the classroom environment. However, she still felt she was somewhat dictating experiences, and has therefore continued to relinquish classroom control. This had been the most challenging aspect of her journey.

Through letting go Charlotte is discovering a new and more powerful kind of pedagogical influence: participation. The learning emerges moment-to-moment in interactions between the children, teacher and physical environment. This is an intrinsically-motivating and collaborative journey of discovery and she says she is now able to spend more time on focused support and less on behaviour management.

Charlotte welcomes academic theory which argues that Playful Pedagogical processes necessarily entail a balance between adult and child influence, and the curricular framework. She describes this as like being expected to give the cast total responsibility for a theatre production, when ultimately the director will be held accountable for its success. In addition, she felt intuitively that adult influence brought value to Playful Pedagogy, provided it was underpinned by the right intent; the adult seeking to understand the play world and journey through each child's eyes, and intervening only if invited, to enrich and contribute to its integrity.

Charlotte also notes that many pupils are desperate to have the teacher involved in their play to share the magic and joy of what they're doing. They also quickly learn that the teacher can get them things they need to take forward their adventure - like a friendly genie rather than a boss. Some children need adult influence more than others, and she notes that striking the right balance is about learning to trust your own instincts while reflecting critically on interventions and their effects.

Outcomes

Charlotte recommends [The Leuven Scale](#) for observing and evaluating play-based CfE E&Os. This assesses individual child behaviour on the two key indicators of successful Playful Pedagogy: motivation and wellbeing. She also tracks progress using child-led learning journals (on the i-pad), and by recording pupil voice in-the-moment, and facilitating whole-class reflection on learning.

Challenges remain in tying open-ended experiences to individual outcomes and reporting. Charlotte is therefore developing an approach to evidencing play which can satisfy the multiple demands school teachers face.

Bringing parents and colleagues on the Adventure

For teachers with sufficient confidence in their approach, the best way to change the perceptions of sceptics is to bring them in and show them first hand. She believes this soon changes minds when they see children challenging themselves in ways relevant to attainment.

Charlotte gives the example of "thinking out of the box", a simple child-led challenge she used towards all curriculum E&Os, which employed nothing but cardboard boxes. She simply added cardboard boxes to her environment's continuous provision and watched to see how different children interacted with the resource. She took a picture of what the children had done with their boxes and recorded how each child explained their creation. Parents were astonished at and converted by the richness of the language and imagination their children had exhibited (and the breadth and depth of curriculum coverage that arose from a single, open-ended resource).

What's next for Charlotte?

Charlotte's future plans for #Play4P1 include continuing the weekly Twitter conversations to unpick policy and research and share professional enquiry projects. She is also setting up a newsletter, a 'speed dating' sharing practice catalogue from a breadth of practitioners, in-depth spotlight features with experts on all areas of play and education, class visits, a book club and a #Play4P1 policy. She has also been recently awarded a research grant to explore the applications of a play-based approach to improving parental engagement and involvement, framed around ["Realising the Ambition"](#).

Charlotte welcomes anyone who wants to be a part of the #Play4P1 network to join in the buzz and the fun too. Since she began this journey 6 years ago, she says she has never looked back. In her words ***"my 'to discover' list is still just as long but I'm now confident I'm on the right track. I still put my heart and soul into my classroom space, interactions and experiences: the children learn and they are happy, but they are also so much more!"***

Setting richness/Play autonomy Assessment

AFFORDANCE CHECKLIST (Score 1 for each item)	
1. Soil, mud or sand for creative manipulation	
2. Loose Mmaterials for creative manipulation or construction	
3. Slopes or dips for running, rolling or hiding	
4. Water for splashing or paddling	
5. Features for climbing, balancing, jumping off or hiding	
6. Pathways for walking, running or hiding	
7. Open spaces for walking or running	
AFFORDANCES TOTAL (Good = 5-7):	
NATURE CHECKLIST (Score 1 for each item)	
1. Mix of animal and bird life	
2. Mix of insect life	
3. Mix of trees of different species and (ideally) ages	
4. Mix of shrubs or hedges	
5. Mix of other flowers, plants and fungi	
6. Logs and deadwood on the ground	
7. Areas of meadow or grass	
8. Water features: puddles, ponds, streams or wetland	
*NATURE TOTAL (Good = 6-8):	
**“AFFORDANCES + NATURE” TOTAL (Good = 10-15; OK = 5-9)	
<small>*The checklist was derived from tools for assessing the play quality of playgrounds and other outdoor spaces, so while affordances total may sometimes be applicable for indoor spaces, the nature and affordances + nature totals are only relevant to outdoor spaces</small>	
PLAY AUTONOMY during the “Experience” AFFORDANCES (the higher the score, the greater the play autonomy)	
Children can use only some features and materials of the space which I have prescribed <i>towards achieving a specified outcome (score 1)</i>	
Children can only use some features and materials of the space which I have prescribed (score 2)	
Children can mostly use any available features and materials, but <i>towards achieving a specified outcome (score 3)</i>	
Children are mostly free to use any available features and materials of the space however they wish (score 4)	
INTERACTIONS (the higher the score, the greater the play autonomy)	
There are rules on how children interact with the space, their peers, and me, <i>towards achieving a specified outcome (score 1)</i>	
There are rules I have prescribed on how children interact with the space, their peers and me during the experience (score 2)	
Children are free to interact with the space, their peers, and me, <i>towards achieving a specified outcome (score 3)</i>	
Children are mostly free to interact with the space, their peers and me however they wish (score 4)	
N.B. These assessment tools were developed for a PHD thesis which investigated the impacts of indoor and outdoor settings on cognition in Scottish primary schoolchildren: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hamilton, J. M. (2020). Closing the attainment gap in Scottish education: The case for outdoors as a learning environment in early primary school. In Place, Pedagogy and Play (pp. 124-142). Routledge. • Hamilton, J. M. (2017). Relationships between outdoor and classroom task settings and cognition in primary schoolchildren (Doctoral dissertation, Heriot Watt University). 	

Playful Pedagogy across the School

The biggest barrier to Playful Pedagogy is often school systems and culture that were setup for a more traditional style of teaching and learning.

Common challenges or barriers teachers report are:

- The practicalities of managing a large class on open-ended activities, especially where there are diverse support needs.
- Expectations and assumptions from management, colleagues, and parents about how children should be taught or assessed.
- Preparing and resourcing suitable spaces and materials, alongside possible new paperwork burdens.
- Misconceptions about what play is, and the fundamental role it serves in formal learning.

Small steps can help you work towards addressing barriers. This begins with experimenting with Playful Pedagogy, and then reflecting upon how systems and culture can be reoriented and adapted without creating additional burdens.

Key elements of this include:

- Building and sharing knowledge of the “why” of playful pedagogy.
- Encouraging outdoor learning as this provides a motivating setting with a free supply of loose materials.
- Developing a suitable reporting and risk assessment framework which doesn't put teachers off from trying.
- Exploring approaches to design and management that give teachers flexibility to support each other on the learning adventure.
- Planning collectively for bigger changes to ensure a one-team approach, with training and support needs identified.

Parents often have the strongest opinions about how their child should be educated. Therefore, you might want to build your playful pedagogical confidence, knowledge and experience before involving them directly in learning adventures. However, once you do, it may be the best way to convince them of its value.

Ways of bringing sceptical parents on the learning adventure might be:

- Directing them towards the weight of evidence and stakeholder support for the approach, and its relationship to attainment.
- Ask parents about how they learn best and use this as a starting point to explore the impact of choice, collaboration, and self-expression on their motivation.
- Point out that countries which employ Playful Pedagogy, and don't focus on formal literacy and numeracy until older years, generally perform better than the UK on both.
- Stress your responsibility is not to individual pupils, but to the whole class. Playful Pedagogy is the best way of creating a one-team approach where no one gets left behind. The learning benefits for their child will become more and more apparent with time.

Overall, thinking about adapting the broader context is a learning adventure itself. It involves the whole school: management, pupils, teachers, and parents. It begins with small steps but engages everyone in reorienting school systems to enable and support best practice.

The case study from Garnetbank Primary School explores how one school integrated Playful Pedagogy across their approach. Meanwhile, this helpful [resource from Highland Council](#) reflects on teachers' experiences and addresses many of the common barriers and ways they might be overcome.

Garnetbank Primary School, whole-school approach to Playful Pedagogy

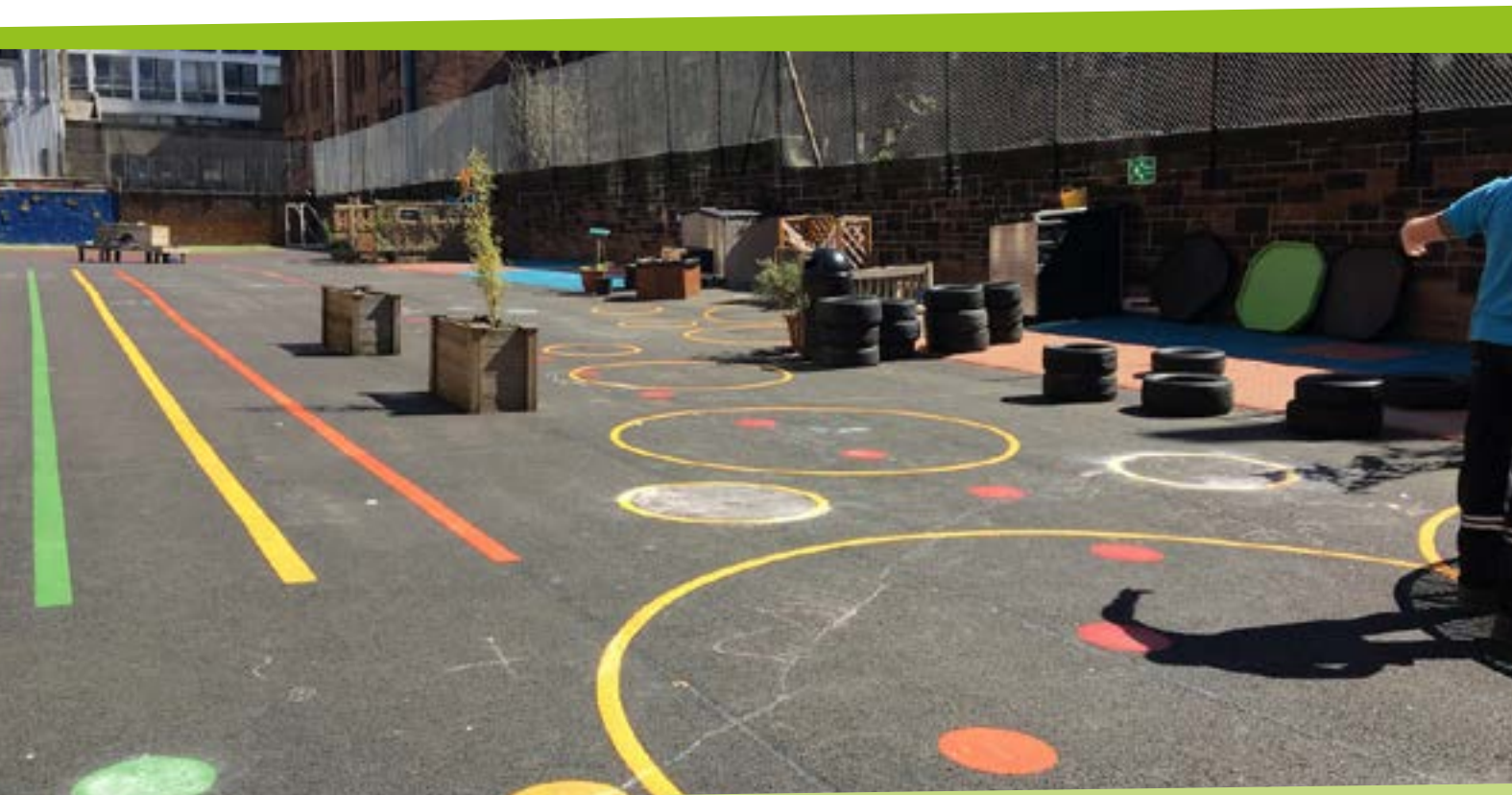
Background

Garnetbank Primary School is a multicultural school in the heart of Glasgow. The playground is 95% asphalt and very small for the number of children who use it. In the autumn of 2017, the Parent Council paid for a wide range of open-ended markings that children use in their play for artwork and physical activities, and loose parts were introduced. In the spring of 2018, a play den was opened along with a garden area providing children with daily access to a natural zone filled with colour and a range of plants.

Ethos and rationale

Under the leadership of their Head Teacher and the full team's commitment, collaboration and solution-focused approach, Garnetbank is a long way down the road to full implementation of a Rights-Respecting Playful Pedagogy Ethos.

Earlier in her career, the Head Teacher had been involved in an experiment where the progress of an early years' "Playful Pedagogy" class was compared against a control group. The main finding was that while academic learning was on a par, the children who had play integrated with their learning measured significantly higher on their **independence, creativity and problem-solving**.



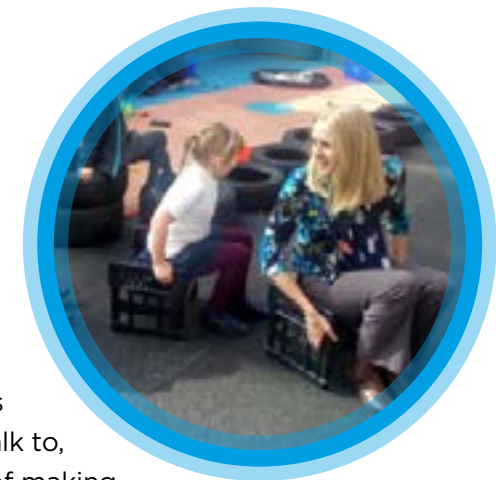
On the basis that these skills and attributes are central to the purpose of education, she has been wholly committed to Playful Pedagogy ever since. While acknowledging it is difficult to demonstrate success in the absence of a control group, she considers a measure is the fact that as a main driver, literacy is enhanced through rich and meaningful contexts for learning; in the older years engagement in learning is high, children are moving from off track to on track in academic learning and management of the classes gets progressively easier as a result of children's increasing self-sufficiency.

Reorienting culture and systems

The Head Teacher acknowledges that enabling and embedding Playful Pedagogy successfully is a non-trivial challenge, as the traditional "bums on seats" school setting and systems have evolved around prescribed processes and outcomes. With Playful Pedagogy, the transformation begins with open-ended experiences and best practice, and then asks how spaces and systems can be adapted to best enable and support these without creating additional burdens for teachers. At Garnetbank, this has and is a collaborative whole-school process, taken in small steps.

Children's participation in decision-making

Many systems within Garnetbank have been reoriented to be child-centred and responsive, ensuring all have a say and their voices heard. There is a Pupil Council who are consulted about outdoor play and playtimes. Weekly assemblies are used to ask children's opinions, seek clarification and gain feedback. A Playground Charter has been developed by the Rights Committee. The pastoral system gives children immediate access to the management team if they wish to seek support from, or talk to, an adult. The children have been actively involved in all aspects of making the changes to practice, including working with parents on ideas for developing the grounds, and with the Child Development Officer to design and build outdoor features.



Putting practice first, not paperwork

The Head Teacher was already well aware of the threat to Playful Pedagogy of "paralysis by analysis". Additionally, there was the exhaustion and demotivation of teachers trying to apply reporting approaches designed to record detailed progress for each child by way of narrowly prescribed lesson plans, to open-ended tasks involving a wide diversity of learning experiences.

Over time, through a process of dialogue between staff, Garnetbank has developed a rationale and model based more around observation, tracking needs and key moments, and continual reflection on the correct balance of adult-initiated interaction and scaffolding. A key part of this is nurturing trust. This is both in the practitioners for their own instincts, so they can feel comfortable curricular objectives are being met without constant explicit measurement. It is also in the parents, so that they feel confident that they're trading off a detailed picture of their child's progress for more effective teaching and richer learning experiences.

Enabling and supporting staff to deliver best practice

There are many ways Garnetbank works with staff to improve their play skills and manage the burden of designing and facilitating Playful Pedagogy. This includes a collaborative and trusting approach between teachers, support staff, Child Development Officer and managers; a structured induction and training for new staff, and continual reflective dialogue around practice.

Nevertheless, the challenges of facilitating Play Pedagogy with large classes can still be overwhelming at times for a single teacher alone. A key innovation in this respect has been Garnetbank's use of the Pupil Equity Fund to bring on a Child Development Officer, who works alongside staff as a 'floating' expert resource. The Child Development Officer helps to bring the whole school vision to life in many different ways including through his deep knowledge of Play Pedagogy and outdoor learning; his ability to build relationships and buy in with parents; and by providing targeted support where needed. He is able to take the weight off the teacher-to-pupil ratio and afford greater flexibility for all staff to facilitate, and support each other, on learning adventures, and manage specific pupil needs.



Balancing "Interactions"

The particular educational challenges faced by Garnetbank perhaps illustrates why purely child-led learning, while it may remain the guiding principle and aspiration of Playful Pedagogy, is not always practical in the real world. 70% of Garnetbank pupils have English as their second language, and therefore many begin school with significant and diverse language support needs. The idea that these could be met through free play, without scaffolding and significant adult intervention is untenable, let alone in a situation where one teacher is responsible for a class of 25 children. However, the Head Teacher stresses that even adult-initiated and highly-structured literacy and numeracy experiences can still be made to feel 'playful' to pupils, for example, by giving them clipboards and the autonomy to choose where they sit, or by taking lessons outdoors. This is where the Child Development Officer can also provide support by enabling smaller group interventions which address particular shared literacy needs.



Leveraging the outdoors

The Head Teacher also highlights the time and procurement challenges associated with resourcing classroom play, and the additional burden this can place on staff. This is one of the drivers for using and developing their outdoor spaces. Despite the significant limitations of being a city centre school and starting with a small impoverished playground, Garnetbank has worked wonders in this regard.

Together with the children, staff and parents, they have developed new zones, introduced open-ended loose materials, tyres, a water wall and music wall. The children helped the Child Development Officer directly design and build aspects of the playground such as the mud kitchen in the P1 space, pirate ship and musical instruments in the main playground. The outdoors has become a rich environment where children can explore, create, collaborate, construct, relax, climb, jump, balance and investigate. In addition to the loose parts, there are a range of other activities from a football area, a dance and music space (very popular with the older children) and a blend of traditional offerings such as space hoppers, skipping ropes and so on. Everything is well used, and the playground is said to have a happy buzz about it.

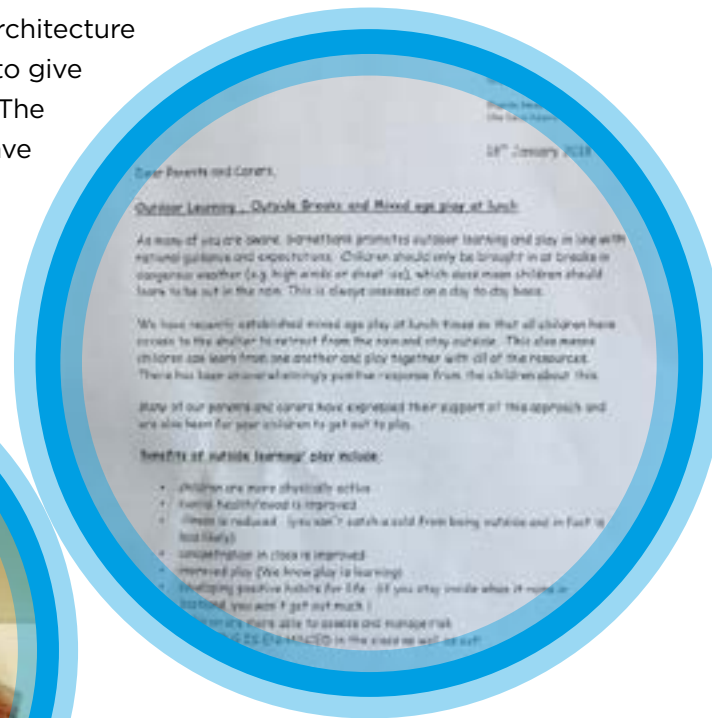


Bringing parents on the adventure

The Garnetbank team recognise both the challenge and value of gaining buy in from parents for Playful Pedagogy. Parents can have strong expectations that their child is to get down to desk-based literacy and numeracy right away, or misassumptions regarding what play is and the value it has. However, the Head Teacher highlights the fact that literacy and numeracy performance is markedly higher than the UK in countries that emphasise play and only begin formal literacy and numeracy in later primary school (e.g. Scandinavia).



The ways Garnetbank works to bring parents on board include “coalition” statements or letters (see example below) which set out clearly the collective ethos and rationale for the approach. These are considered important as an expression of solidarity from which the staff can derive confidence. So too is giving shy staff, or those new to the practice, space to develop their self-belief, knowledge and experience before being exposed to open-ended family sessions. One important element of involving parents in the whole-school journey has been the Playground Architecture Club, where children worked with parents to give their ideas about developing the grounds. The Parent Council together with the school have also been responsible for procuring loose materials for play, and parents have raised funds to enhance the grounds.



Does it work? Ask the children

At Garnetbank, the Head Teacher has led the co-creation of a unique and special whole-school approach to incorporating Play Pedagogy, enhancing playtimes and increasing involvement of children in decisions. This has taken staff, children and parents on a huge journey, which continues to evolve as the whole team works together, one step at a time. In the words of international play expert, and author, Juliet Robertson,

“to spend so much PEF money on play and transforming playtimes is rare. I see in Garnetbank an example that other primary schools can learn from”.

Their continued journey can be found [@PlayLearnGrowG1](https://www.instagram.com/PlayLearnGrowG1)



Main priorities and issues for improvement

1. (All children) traffic lights (or a dinosaur) on the B925 opposite the school. The children proposed, and were unanimous in their support for traffic lights near the school, notorious for speeding cars and trucks. This could be activated by pedestrians or by vehicles which break the speed limit. An alternative was a big dinosaur outside the school under whose legs people could cross the road safely and which would swallow speeding vehicles, to be released only when drivers had paid a substantial fine to the children.

Children noted that drivers seem unaware of the primary school, which is set back from the road, and accelerate or overtake on this stretch because there are no speed bumps. The B925 effectively slices the Children's Map of Auchtertool in two, in that children routinely need to cross or walk narrow paths beside it to get to friend's houses, the school, the play park and other favourite places. It is also a 'short cut' for local commuters and truck drivers, the latter who don't need to slow down because their wheels clear the bumps on both sides. All children were adamant that all measures taken so far to address speeding had not worked or made the road any safer, with many describing 'near-misses'.

Other safety measures proposed by the children included speed cameras, substantial fines (which would be used by the children to invest in other improvements), and larger and better signage at danger spots, particularly, where the road enters the village or close to the school.

2. (All children) improved play facilities and access. All children agreed that the current playpark needed a zipline, roundabout, seesaw and basket swing. All P5-7s agreed Auchtertool would also benefit from a skate and bike park (although the idea was more popular with the boys).



3. (All children) Protecting and enhancing local nature. All children were in agreement on the importance of action to take care of the nature in and around the village. A top priority was protecting the Bottom Burn, one of the last (5) homes for freshwater crayfish in Scotland. Another, was planting 'lots more' trees locally, for playing, building treehouses, climbing, sheltering playing fields and parks from the rain, and to provide homes for animals and birds.
4. (All children) Safe cycle paths and access. All children agreed the village needed a safe cycle path, which would enable them to bike from home to school, the play park, and other important places, and link to the cycle route to Kirkcaldy which started on the B925 outside the village.
5. (All children) A village shop. The children strongly supported the reintroduction of a general store, proposing an ideal location to be the empty premises formerly occupied by a village shop (remembered by the older children), and subsequently, the Kiwi Pub, and Tiel Restaurant. It was essential for the children that the shop sell sweets, stationery and toys, but said it must also stock food and groceries, and have an ATM, enabling their parents, and elderly people who might find travel difficult, to get all they needed in the village.
6. (All children) A village nursery and High School. All children wished there were educational facilities in the village such as they wouldn't have to travel too far to get to them, or be split up from their friends before or after primary school. This was particularly so for P1-4 who thought it silly and difficult for them to be separated from best friends to go to different nurseries as toddlers, only then to be reunited again when they started primary school.
7. (P5-7) Cleaning-up Auchtertool. The older children were unanimous that a top priority was stopping people who let their dogs foul on the village green, play park, streets, and other places children play. Measures proposed included children making poo bag dispensers and clear signage and putting them in the worst affected places, and imposing substantial fines for intentional violation. Other important actions agreed included fixing a broken bench in the play park, cleaning up the bird poo on village benches, and clearing up the litter which drivers throw from their cars as they pass through.
8. Other popular improvements:
 - Many felt their school life could be improved. Suggestions included (i) shorter work periods; (ii) nicer school uniforms; (iii) separation between older and younger children during playtime, so the older could play more energetic games like tig.
 - Many P1-4s thought there should be more opportunities for children to help and interact with the elderly people in the Camilla House Care Home across the road from the school, for the benefit of both.
 - Many felt the village would benefit from more community events where ideas included a local festival and book club.
 - Many felt they were often told off unfairly by some grown-ups in the village when they were just talking and playing with their friends.

Linking with the Curriculum for Excellence

This project made an important contribution to demonstrating a child's right to participate in the matters that affect them (Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child), and incorporated key elements of Learning for Sustainability by supporting pupils to explore their connection to the local environment. It produced a consensually agreed output for sharing with the wider community, and for which all pupils agreed made them feel proud of their place and contribution towards it.

Combined, the sessions incorporated the following Experiences and Outcomes:

Early Years

I explore and discover the interesting features of my local environment to develop an awareness of the world around me.

SOC 0-07a

I explore and appreciate the wonder of nature within different environments and have played a part in caring for the environment.

SOC 0-08a

By exploring my local community, I have discovered the different roles people play and how they can help.

SOC 0-16a

Stage 1

I can describe and recreate the characteristics of my local environment by exploring the features of the landscape.

SOC 1-07a

I can consider ways of looking after my school or community and can encourage others to care for their environment.

SOC 1-08a

Having explored the landscape of my local area, I can describe the various ways in which land has been used.

SOC 1-13a

Through activities in my local area, I have developed my mental map and sense of place. I can create and use maps of the area.

SOC 1-14a

I can contribute to a discussion of the difference between my needs and wants and those of others around me.

SOC 1-16a

By exploring the ways in which we use and need rules, I can consider the meaning of rights and responsibilities and discuss those relevant to me.

SOC 1-17a

I have participated in decision making and have considered the different options available in order to make decisions.

SOC 1-18a

Stage 2

I can discuss the environmental impact of human activity and suggest ways in which we can live in a more environmentally- responsible way.

SOC 2-08a

I can consider the advantages and disadvantages of a proposed land use development and discuss the impact this may have on the community.

SOC 2-08b

Having explored my local area, I can present information on different places to live, work and relax and interesting places to visit.

SOC 2-10a

I can explain how the needs of a group in my local community are supported.

SOC 2-16a



Key resources and references

[A children's map of Auchtertool](#)

[Active Learning in the Early Years \(2007\)](#)

[Building the Ambition \(2014\)](#)

[Charlotte Bowes blog](#)

[Curriculum for Excellence](#)

[Getting it Right for Every Child](#)

Hamilton, J. M. (2020). Closing the attainment gap in Scottish education: The case for outdoors as a learning environment in early primary school.

Hamilton, J. M. (2017). Relationships between outdoor and classroom task settings and cognition in primary schoolchildren (Doctoral dissertation, Heriot-Watt University).

[Highland Council resource - Getting started with Play Pedagogy](#)

[Learning for Sustainability](#)

[Leuven Scales](#)

[Playful Pedagogy](#)

[Play, Learn and Grow at Garnetbank Primary twitter account](#)

[Play Types Toolkit](#)

[Realising the Ambition: Being Me \(2020\)](#)

Wainwright, N. et al, 2020. Playful pedagogy for deeper learning: exploring the implementation of the play-based foundation phase in Wales, Early Child Development and Care.

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Committed to PLAY



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