

Getting Started with Play Pedagogy in P1

Why Play Pedagogy?

In order to secure the best possible outcomes for all learners, our teaching and learning must be child-centred and built upon the child's previous learning and experiences. We know that every child will enter our classroom with a different set of abilities and interests. It is essential that teachers take this into account, by providing teaching and learning that is developmentally appropriate and will ensure a progression of knowledge, understanding and skills across the Early Level curriculum. The Early Level Experiences and Outcomes supports a more responsive, play-based approach to learning and teaching in the Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings and P1 classrooms, and [Realising the Ambition](#) acknowledges that play should be the main vehicle of learning across the Early Level. Through the power of playing together and providing rich, engaging experiences we will not only develop our learners' mental, cognitive and motor skills, but we will also nurture their social and emotional development too. When taking a play-based approach, the practitioner makes use of the environment through considering the spaces, experiences and interactions. Practitioners develop engaging spaces that provide meaningful learning opportunities and they utilise sensitive interactions to ensure progression and continuity of learning. By doing this, we create learners who are motivated leaders of their own learning who can make choices, progress and find success within the [Four Capacities](#).

What to consider?

Classroom Management and Organisation

Avoid making resources and instead opt for open-ended loose part play resources that could be used in a variety of contexts.

Set clear boundaries and routines with your pupils. Provide pupil ownership in the classroom by fostering a classroom community that is responsible for their learning and spaces in the environment.

Extend the learning environment by making good use of indoor and outdoor spaces around the school.

School Systems and Management

Work in partnership with school leaders to shape your rationale for taking a play-based approach.

Make use of current research, publications and government advice to guide your approach.

Develop a process of ongoing evaluation where you collect data and monitor the changes that you make.

Consider a whole school approach to playful learning and what this will look like across the school.

Progress and Attainment

Ensure that there is an appropriate balance of child-initiated, adult-initiated and adult-directed learning.

Create dynamic and continuous assessment systems that make use of the observation cycle, using observations and other assessment tools to plan with and for the children. This should inform your planning to extend the children's knowledge, understanding and skills.

Always start with the individual, their strengths, their areas for development and their interests. Make adjustments to provision as appropriate.

Parents and Families

Provide opportunities for parents to visit your setting and engage with their child's learning.

Engage and educate parents and families by providing workshops that focus on sharing the 'why' of your play-based approach, the 'what' in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills your approach develops and 'how' you develop this in practice.

Reflect on the purpose of home learning and set developmentally appropriate tasks that build on the playful learning in school.

Embedding play into your classroom and practice is complex, takes time and requires undertaking a process of change. It will look different in every classroom and there are many factors to consider. When adopting any approach, you must consider the children in front of you and the community that you and they are a part of. Use these statements to help you create a rationale for play-based learning which is unique to your school and/or classroom.



F.A.Q: Frequently Asked Questions

The journey to a play-based approach is not always easy and can be harder when you feel alone! In this document, you will find some collated advice kindly given by a number of experienced practitioners working in a range of contexts with young children across Scotland.

A key piece of advice stands out: get to know your children well, observe carefully and adapt accordingly. The most important thing you can do for your children is to find out what it is that they need to thrive and then consider how you can best deliver this within your own setting.

Unfortunately, there is no “magic wand” to solve every problem, but we do hope you find this document useful and it provides some inspiration, courage and ultimately, some reassurance!

School Systems and Management

I don't have time to play in my already busy day. What should I do?

“Offering opportunities in class to let children play will lessen the need to ‘pack in’ lots of teacher led activities and will give you time to spend interacting and observing children in their play as well as working with small groups. So much learning can be achieved through carefully thought out, child- led, play activities”

“Review your thinking on learning through play. This is not an add on. This is how children (and adults) learn. They will be more motivated and engaged than you’ll ever have thought!”

“Play is a much deeper and richer form of learning - ensure your children have time to play. You will get to know the individuals so much better and they will love coming to school - building resilience naturally!”

“Timetable play time weekly to begin, then a couple of days and when you see the benefit you’ll add it in daily. Learning through play isn’t the absence of teaching; it’s teaching through conversation, questions and interactions.”

“Change your mind-set about, “letting,” children play. Make a list of all your, “dead,” time throughout the day. How often are you requiring children to sit on the carpet or at a table while listening to you talk? Could that time be utilised better? Which routines can go?”

“Make time! Set aside quality time to spend time interacting. Play is how children learn best- what would you prioritise over that?”

My head teacher wants me to follow the rest of the school for planning and assessment. What should I do?

“You could negotiate with your HT by making reference to [Realising the Ambition](#). Suggest piloting the approach as a trial initially. Otherwise you could begin to introduce some areas of play based learning into your classroom, monitor and evaluate results, and feedback your findings”.

F.A.Q: Play Pedagogy in the Classroom

"Invite management in! Take the time to explain the "why" of play. Do your research so that you can back up your ideas. Getting some other like-minded colleagues on board would be really supportive too."

"You can follow planning in a school format through play. You can still plan for opportunities - if they need to explore measure, then you plan for opportunities in water and sand to explore weight through play. Make use of assessments. Some authorities continue to use SNSA and baseline assessments which highlights the positive impact of play."

"Take another format to them and ask to pilot it as a trial initially to see how it goes or alternatively reach an agreement about which aspects can stay/which can go!"

"Engage your school leaders in self-evaluation by making use of [How Good is Our Early Learning and Childcare? \(HIGOELC\)](#). Quality Indicator 2.2 concerns Pedagogy and Play"

"Keep play at the heart of the planning and adapt to suit the children in front of you.

"The most impactful assessment of any child in school is teacher judgement; you can still do this through a play approach."

My stage partner/job-share does not want to do the approach. What should I do?

"Sometimes people need to have evidence before they commit to change - and that's understandable. Hopefully by the end of Term 2, your stage partner will be seeing the positive results, happy pupils, less stressed 'you' and will be willing to dip her toe in the 'play based learning water'."

"Share your reading material and talk. What is it that they are unsure about? Discuss challenges and solutions. Talk about what you could both do together to meet both teaching styles. Could they observe your teaching? Ask them to join you for a set period of time and then review together - Remember to be supportive! Fear is a great barrier."

"Could you visit a setting that has developed play effectively, together? Make time to talk about what you saw and what changes you could make to improve your teaching and environment."

"Take the plunge and go forward with your approach anyway. People will follow when they see the results."

My school management team are worried that my pupils aren't learning. What do I do?

"Proof is IN the pudding! Show pupil progress through looking and listening to children's talk about learning"

"Share and use your evidence – floor-books, play diaries, video recordings, transcripts, learning journeys and talking with the children. You will still be focusing on literacy, maths and health and well-being. Using your observations and knowledge of the children, demonstrate how much they are coming on. Frame your discussions around the progression of skills. All other areas of the curriculum will be covered through calendar events and the seasons. Be informed and committed to your cause."

"Ask them to give you six weeks to pilot the approach and at the end share your collected observational evidence of impact."

"There is a huge difference between 'trained' primary one pupils and those who are self-directed. Learning doesn't have to happen at a desk. Ask your managers to reflect and discuss the best 'learning' from their school days - most likely outdoors and when they could take risks! The [Lego document](#) is very helpful and has lots of up to date research - could you read and discuss?"

F.A.Q: Play Pedagogy in the Classroom

Recommended Reading:

- Briggs, M. & Hansen, A. (2012) **Play-based Learning in the Primary School**
- Bottrill, G. (2018) **Can I Go and Play Now?: Rethinking the Early Years**
- Ephgrave, A. (2017) **Year One in Action**
- Fisher, J. (2013) **Starting from the Child: Teaching and Learning in the Foundation Stage**
- Robertson, J. (2017) **Messy Maths: A Playful, Outdoor Approach for Early Years**



Progress and Attainment

If the kids are just playing all day, how will I know that they are making progress?

“Your day should have a balance of child led, adult initiated and adult led experiences. These will be carefully selected to encourage progression. Make sure you are gathering a range of different types of data every day. Use focussed observations for assessment and next steps”

“Never say ‘just’ in front of the word play! If you think the children are ‘just playing’ you don’t yet have enough knowledge and understanding of play. You will need further training, professional reading, collegiate working and self-reflection.”

“It happens during a whole school year ... be patient and enjoy the learning journey! Everyone will get there when it is appropriate for them. They were not all born on the same day and ready to start reading at the same time. Valuing the individual is the best way to support learning and make sure you are observing, noticing, extending, questioning.”

“Make time for working one-to-one and carry out assessment through well-planned games that will give you the evidence you need.”

Assessment! How, what, when?

“Depends on the age and stage of the child. Assessment will be ongoing through interactions and observations. Make a skeleton plan of what you hope to cover each term - this way you can ensure you are covering the curriculum.”

“Ongoing. It’s there in front of your eyes. Observation. You’ll build up such a great amount of information about your pupils that when it comes to completing any formal type assessment record, you’ll have a deeper knowledge of the child than ever before. Make use of the [Leuven Scales](#) and [Boxall assessments](#) for monitoring engagement wellbeing.

“Observation, discussion, play, teach, interact... it’s different for every child. Education should be about the joy of learning, not a conveyor belt. Assessment is not appropriate and can increase

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parental stress - this is not a good way to engage families. Celebrate what the child actually can do and talk about how you can work together.”

“Make use of on-going assessment strategies through play. Trying linking the children’s learning to curricular areas not the other way round”.

“Set challenges... what if? I wonder... create spaces and experiences which allows children to demonstrate their understanding and share their thinking.”

“Observe, observe, observe!”

What about a child with additional support needs?

“They will benefit greatly from a play based approach. Some learners benefit from a less structured environment - they will feel more included too! Choose and plan for activities and experiences that offer progression.”

“Start with the child. You need to know the child, their interests and their needs. Plan for their access to learn. Think carefully about what works and what doesn’t, then you can provide play and sensory experiences appropriate to their stage of development.”

“Same as any other classroom, what meets their needs? Play-based is perhaps more likely to meet their needs because you have the flexibility to provide more that can be developmentally appropriate in terms of challenge, as well as, support.”

“I have found they have thrived in this opportunity and have started joining in with direct teaching input of their own accord as they are no longer being forced and there is no battle of wills.”



Useful Links to Explore:

[Realising the Ambition](#)

[Loose Parts Play](#)

[Play Pedagogy Toolkit](#)

[My World Outdoors](#)

[Play Scotland](#)

[Highland Numeracy \(Early\)](#)

[Bumps2Bairns](#)

[Emerging Literacy](#)

Classroom Resources and Organisation

Help! I have no budget or resources. What do I do?

“Allow the children to be creative. You don’t need fancy resources. Think of resources that can be used open-endedly. You can get Kapla blocks on loan - they are so good. A craft area, playing cards, woodwork... My most prominent memories of school were the times I was involved and consulted in my learning - like the time we organised a circus in P2 or the time we wrote a play on the dangers of ‘matches’ in P4.... I can still hear my group chanting the concluding line ‘matches are DANGEROUS’ I still remember how good it felt when my suggestions were listened to and valued.”

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“Read ‘loose parts play’. Think outside the box. ‘Stuff’ is not the answer although you do need some resources. Talk to ELC practitioners and ask them for advice or resources.”

“Play happens naturally and needs few resources. Start small, create spaces. Let the children lead and they will be creative. Be inventive and use what you have- water trays, household items, charity shops, loose parts. Send home a list of items that children and families can collect and bring in.”

“You have water, and an outside environment.”

It is so noisy in the classroom and I feel like the kids get to do whatever they want. What should I do?

“Remember you are still in charge. Look carefully at what’s happening. Are the children busy and deeply engaged? If they’re extremely noisy and wandering around, then probably not. Some children become ‘hyper’ and ‘off-task’ when they are not challenged enough. Work out what they need through good observation and make adjustments. How can you extend their thinking without interrupting? Provide provocations – experiences that create excitement and interest. Use adult interaction to support cooperative working and playing.”

“You will still need rules and boundaries. Invest time developing rules and routines. Talk to the children, ask them what you can do? Agree when it needs to be quieter. I used to find that when deep play happened the noise level reduced as they were so engrossed and engaged. Model use of areas and resources. Practise differing noise levels for different purposes.”

“Try to use an outdoor space whenever possible, you will get used to the noise. Celebrate the fact that so many conversations are happening, so many social interactions - lots of language development going on”

“Young children still need structure and guidance. Set targets (whole class and individual). Give them tasks that encourage leadership and ownership of learning – and make them accountable! Make time for reflection after a long period of play. Ask them about what they have learned and use this feedback for planning. Reflect on your own interactions – remember to play too! Play is not abandoned learning”

“Re-arrange your learning environment so the quiet areas are closer to your teaching table. Put the noisier areas out in your corridors! Reduce the number of areas at first- if you do too much, too soon you will overwhelm the children. Scale it back until you are comfortable- start small.”

When do I do reading groups?

“Timetable these in just like anything else (literacy, maths and health and well-being) that you feel is not being learned through play. Look for natural moments of transition if possible. For example, when the children come back into the classroom after break.!”

“It depends what you mean by reading group. Reading the book? Teaching phonics and possibly early phonological awareness? You can set activities up which are adult initiated. When children are busy and engaged in activities that stimulate them then you can work with a small group. Make reading fun!”

“When it suits your class and the children are ready. This will be different for everyone.”

“I do reading groups during the course of the morning and work with two small groups. If I have PSA slots, they are able to work with a group or I will often do a whole class big book session.”

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"I like to read with the pupils individually or in a small group of three. Make it personal and meaningful"

"Do children need to learn to read in groups? Think carefully about the specific skills and knowledge you want to teach. Can it be done whole class or individually? Don't waste time doing book walk-throughs!"

I am working really long hours making resources and spending my own money trying to give my pupils play. It is not working. What do I do?

"Stop! I did this too and found that some children didn't engage with resources. I (and anyone else in my household) spent lots of time and money creating. Maybe each child could take responsibility for their own learning and visit the areas you wish them to -but in their own time. Provide a visual where they can account for this. Kids love responsibility. You will be amazed at how much they cover when they are free to follow their own path. You will have more time to discuss learning with them too."

"You don't give the pupils play. The children are learning as they play. You need to do more observations. Stop making resources and look at what truly engages them. Ask school staff to bring items in for loose parts- build up a collection. Use crates, boxes, cable reels donated from firms."

"Ask SMT and HT for help with resourcing loose parts. Children don't need lots of 'stuff'. Open ended resources are best – a lot of learning can be discovered with a simple cardboard box."

"Stop, breathe and take a step back. Children's play is important so plan everything around children's interests – how much of the resources that you are making are they actually engaging with? Give yourself a routine and stick to it. It is the children who should be doing the work!"

"Reduce the resources in the room and watch the quality of the play go up. Plan spaces with purpose. Focus on junk modelling/mark making/ working with real world items."

Family Engagement:

[Parent Club](#)

[Parentzone Scotland](#)

[Bumps2bairns](#)

[Upstart Scotland](#)



Parents and Families

My parents keep asking – “Why is my child playing all day?” What do I do?

"I think it's important to share your intentions with parents from the start. As a parent myself, I would be anxious that my child was going to be left behind. Host an open session weekly where the children can share learning with parents or another family member. Maybe the last half hour on a Friday?"

"Speak to your SLT about adopting an early years or whole school approach to play. As a school team, discuss ways to engage, educate and involve parents, such as hosting workshops"

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“Take photos and celebrate the wee moments. Show the families that you value the learning that happens in play - explain the importance of play and the need to move and develop the whole body. Help the parents see that children learn through play.”

“Share evidence and research about why this approach works. Reassure them that there is a balance of experiences and it isn’t all just child led. Make links to the curriculum and make reference to [Realising the Ambition](#). Explain that P1 is still Early Level”

“Re-label it. It’s not play, it’s learning through experience or exploratory learning.”

What about homework? Should I give my children homework?

“Ask yourself “why?” Does it have a clear purpose? Is it enjoyable, helps share and reinforce their learning? Otherwise... Is there a point?”

“No formal work. Encourage families to share a story or rhymes, ideas for counting games, messy play, play simple board games, schema activities etc. Keep it simple. By the time children get home after a busy day, they are tired.”

“I give my pupils homework grids and once they start phonics, they take home sound cards and some games. Reading book once we start.”

“Make sure it is appropriate for the learner”

More Questions?

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And Finally...

Help! This is really hard. I am tired and I feel like I am getting nowhere. The staff in my school think my class is wild. I feel like I am failing and I want to give up. It was easier before. What do I do?

“Good teaching is never ever easy. Do you believe in what you’re doing? If so stick with it. It’s worth the pain. Get others in the school involved. Invite colleagues to join you and observe what’s happening. Talk to the children and reconnect.”

“In what way are they ‘wild’? They shouldn’t be wild, if anything they will be more engaged. Don’t give up! Lots of time outdoors is great for letting off steam and being noisier. Revisit boundaries and expectations. It’s all about trust.”

“Stick with it - play is the right thing! Ask for help from others in the same position - we are all in this together! And this year, we have Realising the Ambition and we know this is the right thing.

“Developing play takes time. Remember your ‘why’.”

“Don’t give up- everyone feels like this at some point- ask for help, there is support about. Make connections with others offering a play approach. There may be a tiny aspect of practice that needs tweaked that will have a huge impact overall. We learn by doing and reflecting.”

With thanks to the members of the [Scottish Educators Connect](#) group who generously contributed to this document.



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