# A North Lanarkshire Facilitation Guide to Play Pedagogy

Introduction and Background

Since 2013, there has been a focus by the Scottish Government to aspire for Scotland "to be the best place for children to grow up and learn" (Realising the Ambition: Being Me, 2020:9), where children are placed at the centre. We now have a national guidance framework that supports practitioners to build foundations in the early years and ensure we are meeting the developmental needs of all children by providing high quality interactions, experiences and spaces.

A child-centred pedagogical approach is versatile and will look different from school to school. However, to implement highly effective practice, it is crucial that there is a shared understanding of the principles and values that underpin the Early Level curriculum.

Realising the Ambition: Being Me (2020) outlines three key components that are key to ensuring high quality provision through play pedagogy:

- A clear rationale and shared understanding of the value of play.
- Learning environments which feature thoughtful interactions, experiences and outcome.
- Skilled and knowledgeable practitioners.
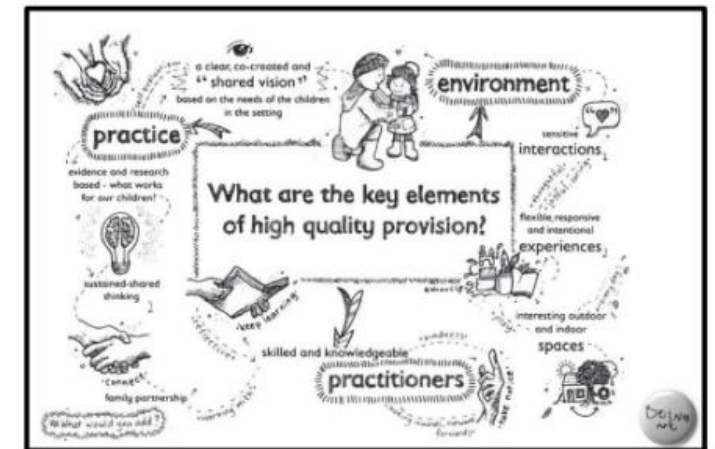
Introduction and Background

NLC's Mission Statement

Section 1: what is Play Pedagogy?

North Lanarkshire is committed to Getting it Right for Every Child. To support children's fundamental right to learn through play and exploration, we have created the following mission statement:

Successful Learners

Confident Individuals

To provide a child-centred pedagogy across early level and beyond that improves outcomes for all children in North Lanarkshire, we co-create nurturing, developmentally appropriate environments that spark creativity and curiosity. These environments foster meaningful interactions and spaces, supporting learners to thrive academically, physically, socially and emotionally. This approach enables them to be successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.

Responsible Citizens

Effective Contributors

This facilitation guide will assist educators in implementing a child-centred pedagogy that aligns with our mission.

Section 1: What is Play Pedagogy?

Defining Play Pedagogy and Play

Play pedagogy is a systematic and child-centred approach that will help to support the practice of powerful learning and teaching in schools. It will help schools to develop a shared language and understanding of how to support learning and teaching that nurtures the holistic development of children's cognitive, social, emotional and physical capacities (Realising the Ambition: Being Me, 2020).

Defining play in an educational context can be difficult as it has various connotations. The Scottish Government recognises the importance of play and states that it:

> **"...encompasses children's behaviour which is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. It is performed for no external goal or reward and is a fundamental and integral part of healthy development which seeks to improve play experiences for all children." (2013b, p.14)**

Therefore, it is fundamental that our education system affords time for "free play" if it is to meet the needs of all children. Essentially, highly effective learning and teaching should occur through a continuum of adult-directed, adult-initiated and child-led learning (Fisher, 2016), where children experience a balance of all three contexts of learning.

Teacher agency and professional judgement are paramount in providing a suitable pedagogy that supports all children to be successful learners, effective contributors, responsible citizens and confident individuals. The balance of learning contexts is determined by the needs of the children in each setting and will shift throughout the day or week to meet the needs of all learners.
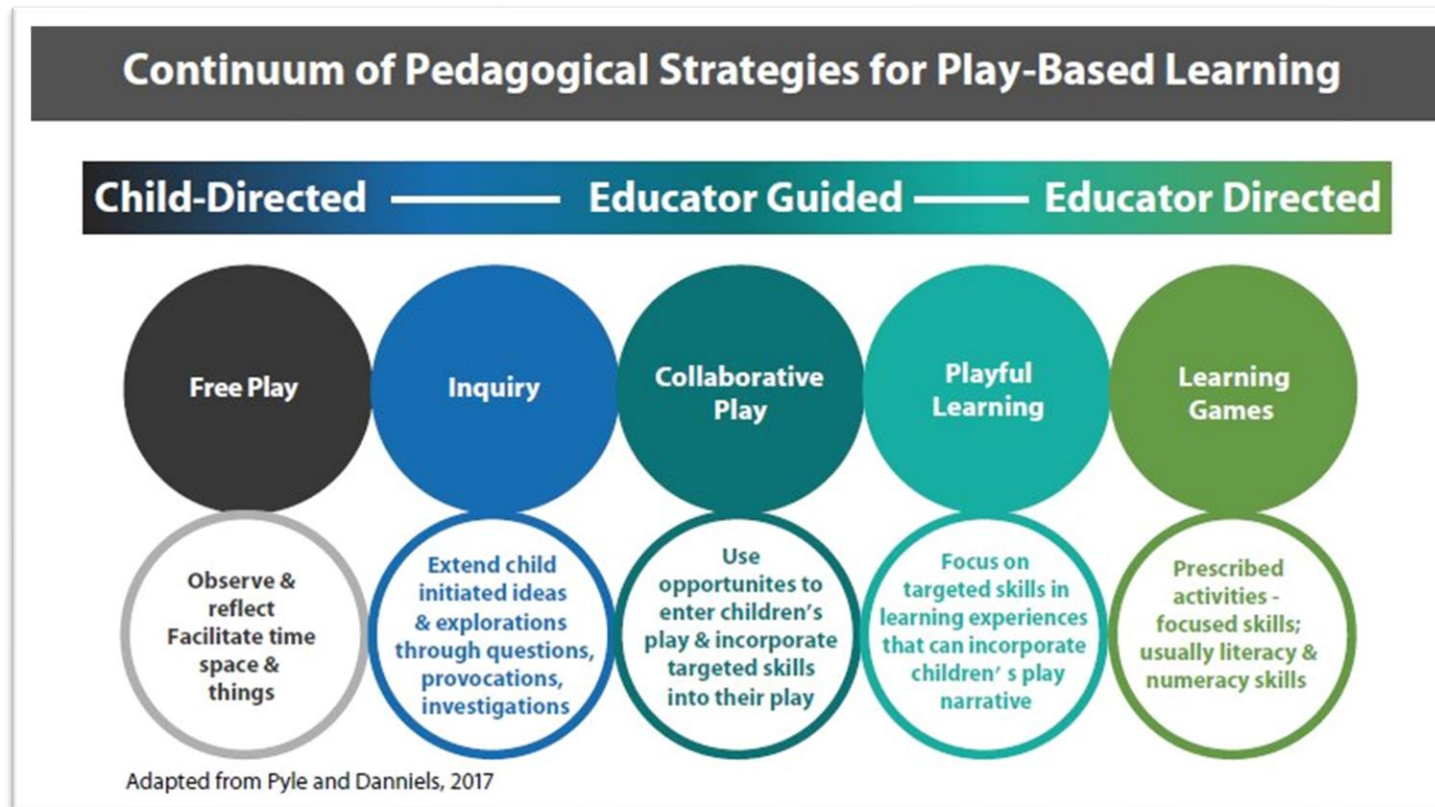
Continuum of Pedagogical Strategies for Play-Based Learning

Child-Directed —— Educator Guided —— Educator Directed

| Free Play	Inquiry	Collaborative Play	Playful Learning	Learning Games
Observe & reflect Facilitate time space & things	Extend child initiated ideas & explorations through questions, provocations, investigations	Use opportunites to enter children's play & incorporate targeted skills into their play	Focus on targeted skills in learning experiences that can incorporate children's play narrative	Prescribed activities - focused skills; usually literacy & numeracy skills

Adapted from Pyle and Danniels, 2017

Characteristics of Play

A framework created by leading practitioners, researchers and policymakers around the world, outlines five characteristics of playful experiences. It helps to articulate the essential link between play and learning (Lego Foundation, 2018):

A play pedagogy can help to transform children's educational experiences in our primary one settings and beyond and strengthen their learning, motivation and outcomes.

Play offers children: enjoyment and fun, a sense of agency and wellbeing, opportunities for creative and critical thinking, refinement of skills since birth, development of skills that will last a lifetime and consolidation of skills learned more formally (Fisher, 2020). Additionally, Bruce's "Twelve Features of Play" (1991, 2015) offers a comprehensive explanation of the essence of play.
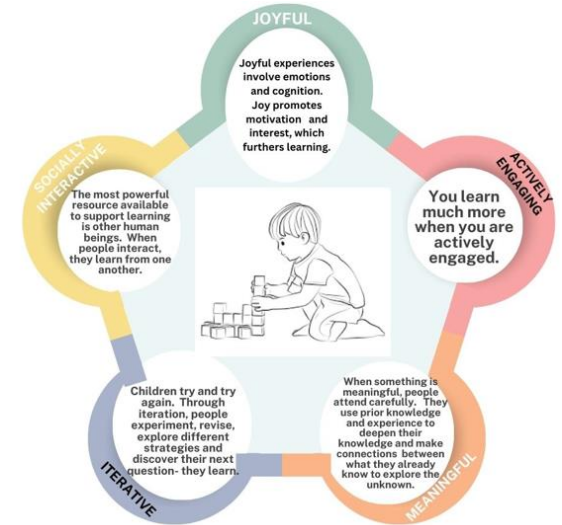
Tina Bruce 12 features of Play

1. Children use first-hand experiences from life.
2. Children make up the rules as they play in order to keep control.
3. Children symbolically represent as they play, making and adapting play props.
4. Children choose to play; they cannot be made to play.
5. Children rehearse their future in their role play.
6. Children sometimes play alone.
7. Children pretend when they play.
8. Children play with adults and other children cooperatively in pairs or groups.
9. Children have a personal play agenda, which may or may not be shared.
10. Children are deeply involved and difficult to distract from their deep learning as they wallow in their play and learning.
11. Children try out their most recently acquired skills and competences, as if celebrating what they know.
12. Children coordinate ideas and feelings and make sense of relationships with their families, friends and cultures.

Section 2: A Rationale for Play Pedagogy

Child Development

Early childhood, defined as the period from birth to age eight, is a time of significant growth with brain development at its peak (UNESCO, 2017). During these years, the development of emotional wellbeing, cognitive skills, social competence and sound mental and physical health build a strong foundation for success into adult years (UNICEF, 2018). Therefore, as educators, it is essential to ensure our pedagogical practices in the early years (birth to 8 years old) build these competences in children. Our early years classrooms must reflect a pedagogy that is enabling for all children.

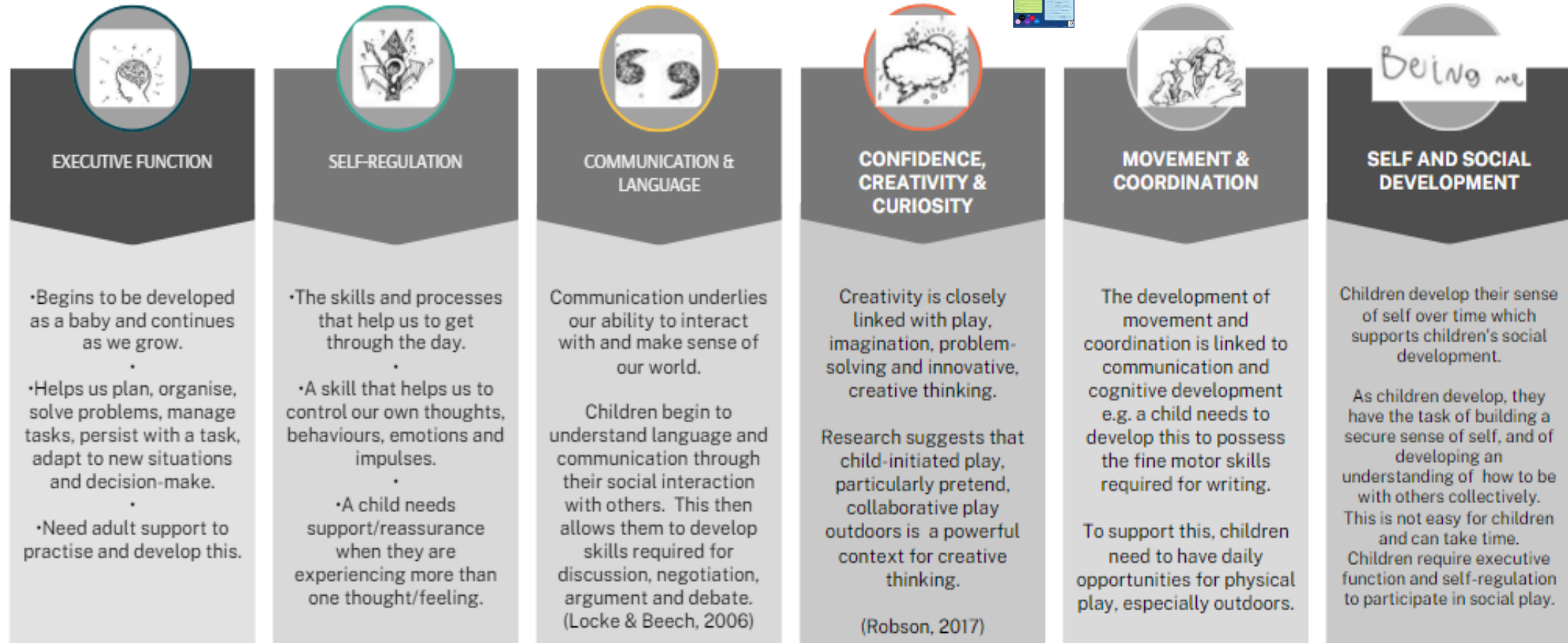Six dimensions of development that are central to learning, surviving and flourishing (Realising the Ambition, 2020:23 *Adapted from West Partnership Improvement Collaborative*):

EXECUTIVE FUNCTION

- Begins to be developed as a baby and continues as we grow.
- Helps us plan, organise, solve problems, manage tasks, persist with a task, adapt to new situations and decision-make.
- Need adult support to practise and develop this.

SELF-REGULATION

- The skills and processes that help us to get through the day.
- A skill that helps us to control our own thoughts, behaviours, emotions and impulses.
- A child needs support/reassurance when they are experiencing more than one thought/feeling.

COMMUNICATION & LANGUAGE

Communication underlies our ability to interact with and make sense of our world.

Children begin to understand language and communication through their social interaction with others. This then allows them to develop skills required for discussion, negotiation, argument and debate. (Locke & Beech, 2006)

CONFIDENCE, CREATIVITY & CURIOSITY

Creativity is closely linked with play, imagination, problem-solving and innovative, creative thinking.

Research suggests that child-initiated play, particularly pretend, collaborative play outdoors is a powerful context for creative thinking.

(Robson, 2017)

MOVEMENT & COORDINATION

The development of movement and coordination is linked to communication and cognitive development e.g. a child needs to develop this to possess the fine motor skills required for writing.

To support this, children need to have daily opportunities for physical play, especially outdoors.

SELF AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Children develop their sense of self over time which supports children's social development.

As children develop, they have the task of building a secure sense of self, and of developing an understanding of how to be with others collectively. This is not easy for children and can take time. Children require executive function and self-regulation to participate in social play.

Play Theory

For many years, theorists have recognised that play is central to children's development and can be used to support their learning (Froebel 1782-1852; Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978).

> **"...play at this time is not trivial, it is highly serious and of deep significance" (Froebel, 1826)**

Once we understand how children grow, develop and learn, we must provide experiences that support their holistic development. Psychologists have suggested that spontaneous play is natural and healthy for children and children learn best through play. Through play all areas of child development can be enhanced: social, emotional, physical, cognitive, language and literacy skills and self-regulation (Ginsburg, 2007).

International evidence shows that children under the age of seven benefit from an educational approach that supports their all-round physical, emotional, social and cognitive development, rather than pushing them towards early academic achievement (Upstart Scotland).

UK Department of Education (2004) research highlighted that an extended period of play-based early education made a significant difference to learning and well-being though the primary school years (Sylva et al for the EPPE Project).

The wealth of theory and research outlining how play helps to foster the progression of skills in all areas of child development: intellectual, social, emotional and physical has been widely recognised in our national practice guidance document (Realising the Ambition: Being Me, 2020).

Burns, 2019

The document identifies five key elements required for positive transition, known as "The Five C's".   This element of "consistency" re-iterates a key message conveyed in Curriculum for Excellence (2004) which states that early level spans nursery through to Primary one where there should be progression and continuity. As Fabian (2002) suggests:

"After nursery education children continue to learn by playing. They do not stop learning through interactive processes and direct experience just because they change classes."
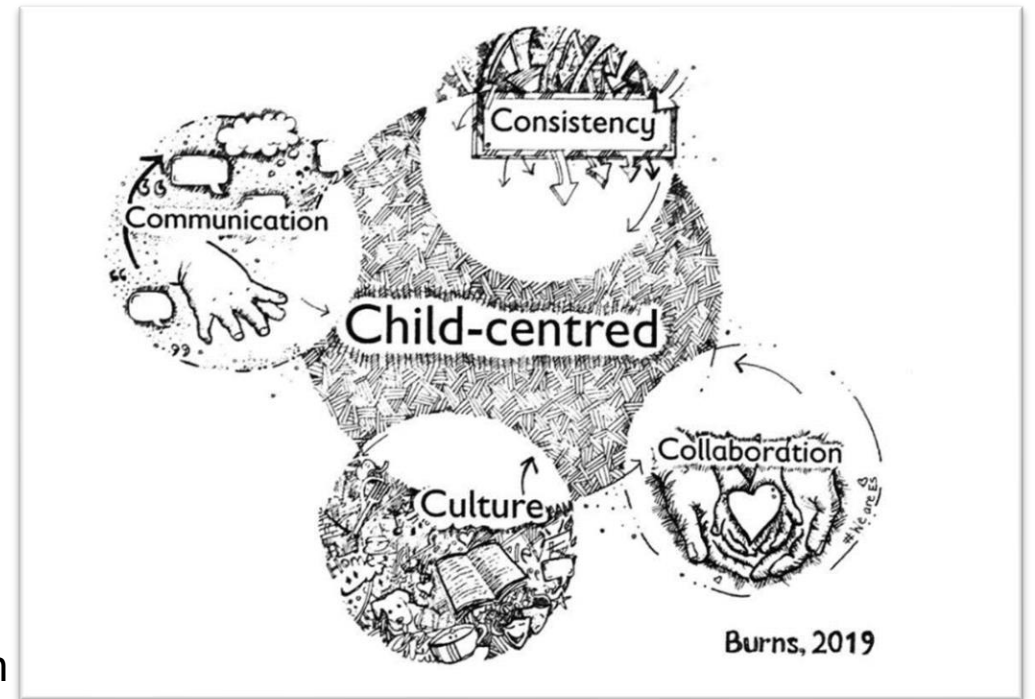
Policy Drivers and Frameworks.

There are numerous policies and frameworks that support a play-based pedagogy in primary schools.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

The UNCRC recognises children's right to play (Article 31). In Scotland, it is now a **legal right** for children to play (2024).
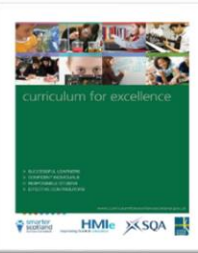
Curriculum for Excellence (CfE, 2004)

This gives prominence to a child-centred play pedagogy and curriculum and indicates that it is fundamental in bridging the gap at Early Level. It suggests that there should be a collaborative approach between ELCC settings and schools to ensure **continuity** and planned **progression** in learning. This framework empowers education settings and practitioners to make decisions needed to provide **"a coherent, flexible and enriched curriculum"** that reflects the diverse needs of individual learners across different contexts, allowing all learners to develop as successful learners, effective contributors, responsible citizens and confident individuals. Furthermore, its Principles of Curriculum Design aligns with a play pedagogy.
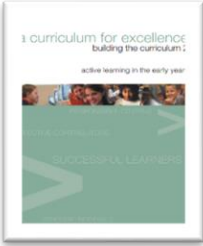
Building the Curriculum 2 (2007)

This provides practical support to implementing a play pedagogy. It highlights that HMIE identified that a key theme for improvement in primary schools was that:

"...the quality of pupils' learning experiences is still too variable and often lacks relevance, engagement and excitement."

Furthermore, it implies that in early years in schools a more formal approach to teaching and learning is still prevalent, despite a wealth of research identifying that developmentally appropriate practice is more conducive to effective learning. Building the Curriculum 2 emphasises that Early Level in Curriculum for Excellence was designed to provide:

"time and space for children to experience a wide range of learning opportunities at an appropriate pace and in sufficient depth to provide challenge and to meet their intellectual needs"

Realising the Ambition: Being Me (2020)

Our National Practice Guidance extends and strengthens the approaches introduced in Building the Curriculum 2. It provides educators with practical guidance and support which promotes a clear understanding of curriculum progression and continuity in children's learning and development. This guidance states that for children to have equal access to broad and balanced learning experiences, we need to know **what we want children to learn** and **how best children learn.** The document makes explicit links between practice, theory and policy guidance to reinforce aspects of high-quality provision.

Play Strategy for Scotland: Our Action Plan (2013)

The Scottish Government published the first National Strategy for play in June 2013, outlining that play is **"a fundamental and integral part of healthy development"**. This National Strategy seeks to **"improve play experiences for all children"**, emphasising the importance of a collective commitment that allows children to develop skills and knowledge and a positive attitude to learning.
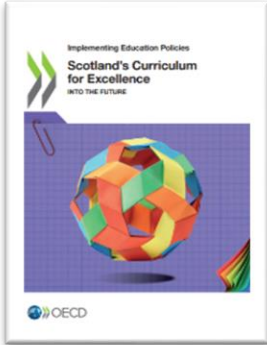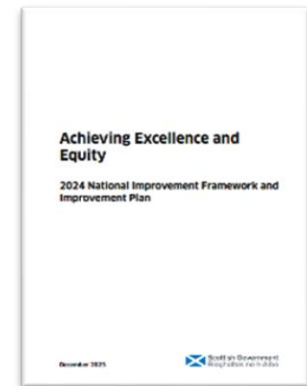
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Scotland (OECD, 2017, 2021)

The OECD (2017) outlined key features of effective pedagogy: high quality, child-centred adult-child interactions; joint creation of pedagogical transition practices; a balanced curriculum that values play, offers opportunities to develop self-regulation and provides suitably challenging learning experiences; and a 'hybrid pedagogy' that provides continuities between Early Learning and Childcare settings and Primary 1.

Furthermore, in response to the OECD recommendations in 2021, the National Improvement Framework (2024) identified a need for an education system that supports joyful learning that builds children's confidence and equips them to be successful and contribute in their life, work and world. The OECD (2021) also indicated that teachers need to be supported to use relevant research and methods, such as professional enquiry, to take innovative decisions about the curriculum.

Putting Learners at the Centre: Towards a Future Vision for Scotland's Education (2022)

The Ken Muir report from 2022 states that there was:

"repeated support for retaining the increasing focus being given to outdoor learning and to active, play-based, relationship-centred learning in the early years and early primary."

All Learners in Scotland Matter: The National Discussion on Education (2023)

The National discussion on Education paper stated one of the key themes during discussion was the importance of:

'Cultivating joy and the love of learning where learning takes place in a range of settings and approaches, including the importance of play and outdoor learning for all ages"

By defining play pedagogy and exploring the theory, research and policy underpinning a play pedagogy, this has provided a clear rationale of why learning through play is essential in primary one.

Section 3: Implementing Play Pedagogy

Understanding how children would benefit from a play pedagogy, what play theorists have said about play and a definition of play pedagogy for practitioners, helps to inform decision making about universal provision in Primary One. However, what does Play Pedagogy look like in our classrooms?

"Every learning environment in terms of interactions, experiences and spaces – both indoors and outdoors – tells a story about how play is valued. The learning environment in the early stages of primary school should not look or feel starkly different from a motivating ELC environment. The level of provocation might be greater, the interaction might be more challenging, and the experiences on offer might be different, but the school environment should be conducive to learning through play. Achieving a consistent pedagogical approach across ELC sector and the early primary stages should be a key aspiration." (Realising the Ambition 2020)

The idea that classrooms will be set up as spaces to encourage and develop rich learning experiences, involving play, choice, and children more freely moving around the space than in the traditional classroom can seem a challenge when there are still the expectations for meeting our attainment targets and implementing NLC Active Literacy etc. There can seem to be a paradox here – how is it possible to deliver strong effective learning and teaching whilst providing a play-based pedagogy?
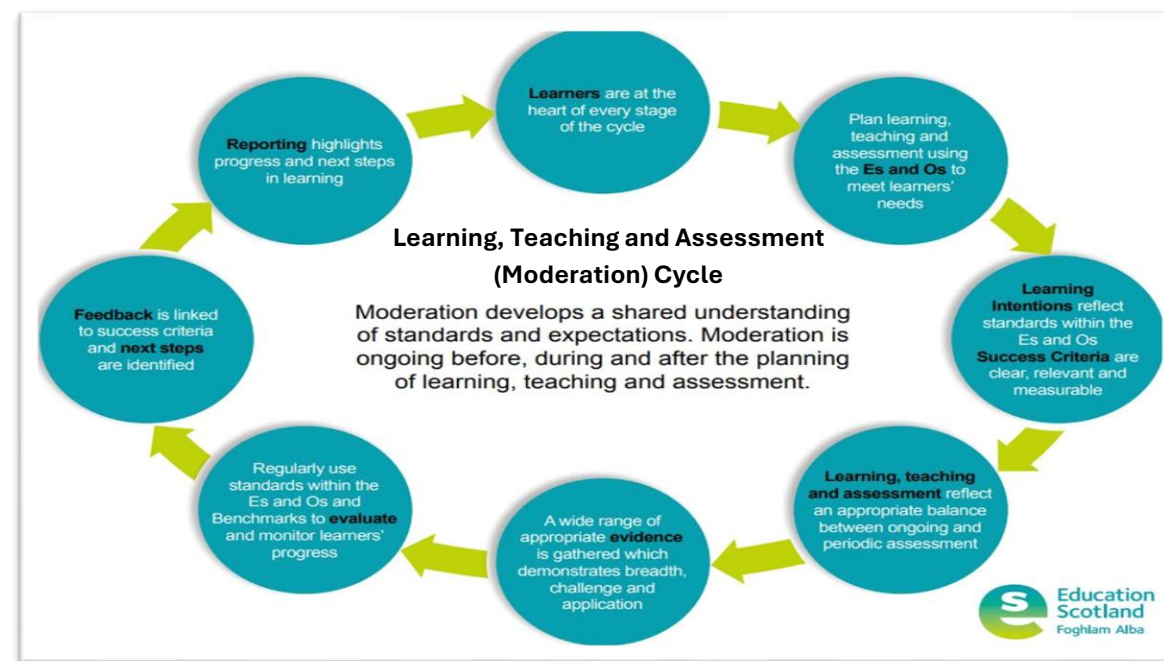
The answer is that practitioners need to be skilled in providing both and there need not be a clash. Practitioners should aim to provide strong, effective learning and teaching whilst also providing opportunities for children to explore, create, develop and lead their learning. Julie Fisher states that "there is no contrast between child-led and adult-led learning. It is the one without the other that gives young children an impoverished experience." (Fisher 2016) Therefore practitioners need to be providing experiences which ensure a balance of high quality, adult-led teaching and developmentally appropriate, child-led learning to ensure we are providing the best learning and teaching opportunities for children.

The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Cycle
No matter what type of pedagogy is being used, the LTA Cycle is central to self-evaluation and moderation of the learning, teaching and assessment happening in schools.

Learning, Teaching and Assessment (Moderation) Cycle

Moderation develops a shared understanding of standards and expectations. Moderation is ongoing before, during and after the planning of learning, teaching and assessment.

- Learners are at the heart of every stage of the cycle
- Plan learning, teaching and assessment using the Es and Os to meet learners' needs
- Learning Intentions reflect standards within the Es and Os Success Criteria are clear, relevant and measurable
- Learning, teaching and assessment reflect an appropriate balance between ongoing and periodic assessment
- A wide range of appropriate evidence is gathered which demonstrates breadth, challenge and application
- Regularly use standards within the Es and Os and Benchmarks to evaluate and monitor learners' progress
- Feedback is linked to success criteria and next steps are identified
- Reporting highlights progress and next steps in learning

Education Scotland
Foghlam Alba

High quality learning and teaching should involve:

- Learning Intentions and Success Criteria which reflect the standards within the Experiences and Outcomes.
- Effective questioning to elicit learning, understand children's thought processes and provoke further thinking and learning.
- Opportunities for self-assessment, self-regulation and metacognition.
- Opportunities for peer-assessment and reciprocal learning.
- Effective feedback linked to the learning and next steps.

Additionally, in North Lanarkshire Council there is a strong, research-based approach to the teaching of literacy. This approach has been robustly verified and should still be the foundation of teaching literacy. Practitioners may adjust the pace or structure of the lessons to adapt to the needs of the learners, but the core methodologies e.g. a systematic synthetic phonic approach should remain the key methodologies for teaching, as they have been proven from extensive world-wide research to be the most effective way to teach young children.
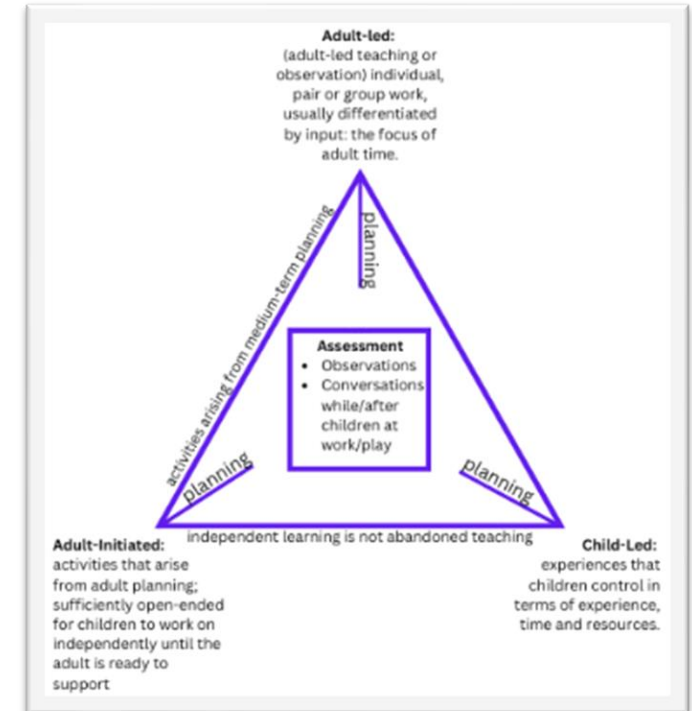
The Balance of the Learning Contexts

As mentioned previously, a balance between child-led and adult-led learning should be provided in order to provide the best, balanced, learning experience for children.

Fisher (2016) describes the three contexts in which children learn well in any high-quality learning establishment:

- Adult-led learning -Practitioners **focus** children's thinking. The practitioner has planned objectives and stays with the child or group of children while the learning takes place
- Adult-initiated learning – Practitioners **fathom** (come to understand and then develop) children's thinking. The practitioner sets up resources or experiences with planned intentions, which children then engage in independently until the practitioner is ready to come and observe or interact.
- Child-led learning – Practitioners **follow** children's thinking. Resources, experiences and outcomes are freely chosen by the child and are under the control of the child. This may or may not have the direct involvement of the practitioner.

Adult-led:
(adult-led teaching or observation) individual, pair or group work, usually differentiated by input: the focus of adult time.

planning

activities arising from medium-term planning

Planning

Assessment
- Observations
- Conversations while/after children at work/play

Planning

independent learning is not abandoned teaching

Adult-Initiated: activities that arise from adult planning; sufficiently open-ended for children to work on independently until the adult is ready to support

Child-Led: experiences that children control in terms of experience, time and resources.

There should be a balance of the learning contexts that children experience.

"Developing the right balance between child-initiated, adult initiated and adult-directed experiences, will depend on the uniqueness of the needs of each setting's children and wider contexts; including the cultural environment in which children learn and play." (Realising the Ambition 2020)

Similarly, the balance will shift and adapt throughout the day or week, in that there may be a need for more adult-led or adult initiated learning, in for example literacy teaching, but many more opportunities for child-led learning through IDL.

	Child Led	Adult Initiated	Adult Led
Informed By	Observations Experiences and Outcomes and Benchmarks Curricular Progression Pathways Pupil Voice and Collaboration		
Planned For	• Context • Zones and spaces • Resources • Skills • Role of adult/interactions	• Context • Zones and spaces • Resources • Skills • Activities • Role of adult/interactions • Assessment of Learning Questions • LI and SC	• Context • Zones and spaces (direct teaching) • Resources • Skills • Activities • Role of adult/interactions • Assessment of Learning Questions • LI and SC
Planned Assessment	• Observations • Retrospective tracking of Experiences and Outcomes • Photos/Videos both (adult and learners documenting) • Self Assessment	• Observations • Assessment questions and Success Criteria • Say Write Make Do • Photos/Videos both (adult and learners documenting) • Self/Peer Assessment	• Observations • Assessment questions and Success Criteria & HQA • Say Write Make Do • Photos/Videos both (adult and learners documenting) • Self/Peer Assessment
	Play Plenaries		

Structuring the Day to manage the Balance

Curriculum for Excellence was designed to give practitioners some flexibility in how to use their day and time to meet the needs of their learners. Therefore, any guidance on a potential structure of the day is just that – guidance, which can be adapted as suited, but many practitioners have found the following method to be useful in organising their blocks of time. This method was taken from the work of Deirdre Grogan.
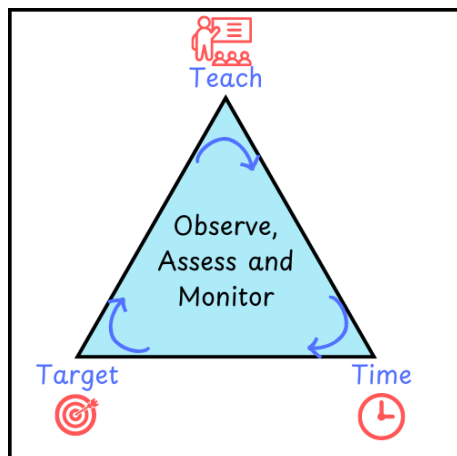
Teach – the adult-led section of traditional teaching, e.g. whole class introduction, teaching your reading or maths groups. Short, sharp and punchy works best for young learners.

Target – an adult-initiated task which children will complete independently. This would be a follow up task to the previous day's teaching. The task would be differentiated, at the learner's level. The task could be a jotter task, or it might be an activity designed to consolidate previous learning or to explore concrete materials further. These tasks must be independent to allow the practitioner to teach another group. To start with they would be very simple to just train the children in the routine but as learning progresses, activities taught by the teacher at the teaching table can become future target tasks. The learner can choose when they want to complete the target task but are given a time frame e.g. by playtime or lunchtime. Some practitioners allow the child to choose where they want to complete the activity while others have a designated table for target tasks.

Features of Highly Effective Practice

Structuring Teach, Target, Time

Self-Evaluation – How Good Is Our Play?

Assessment and Observation

Section 4: Interactions, Experiences and Spaces

A useful way to organise target tasks is to have numbered or graphic labelled trays or drawers with the task, jotters, etc. ready inside. Then learners' names have the corresponding number or picture next to their name, so they know what task to complete. When they have completed the task, they remove the number or picture card and put it in a box or basket, so that the practitioner can see who has completed the task and who needs a reminder when it is nearing the completion deadline. As children progress, they can have more than one target task or for older children they can have a more detailed target task with a longer deadline e.g. for the week.
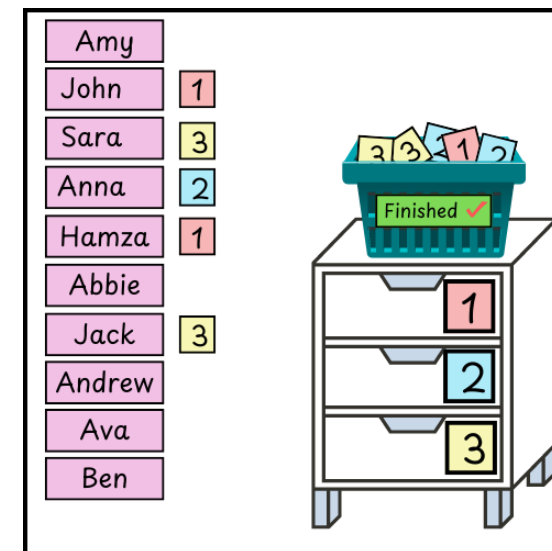
Where the target task is an activity rather than a jotter piece, children can be trained to evidence their work by taking a tag with their name or photo and placing it beside the completed activity and using the iPad to take a photo. Reminder cards can be added to the activity to show children how the learning would be recorded or self-assessed e.g. photo, video, audio description. The practitioner can then look at this evidence as part of their play plenary and discuss how well they have met the intended learning. In these examples the practitioner uses a Learning Ladybird and a Successful Spider to talk about learning intentions and Success Criteria.

Time – this is the child-led part, the **time** for children to engage in play. They can freely choose from the provocations and equipment available to them. It is important that practitioners take time to observe and assess and join in with the children through their play.

Using this method of Teach, Target, Time means some children will be working with the teacher, some will be completing a directed task, and some will be engaged in free play activities, and they will move between the three throughout their day. During some periods of the day there may be a greater focus on adult led learning and at other times a greater focus on child-led learning, but it is a balance across the three throughout the week that we should aim for.

The following 3 pages can be used as a self-evaluation to see how good our provision is across these three context of learning and the Interactions, Experiences and Spaces we provide for our learners.

The following has been adapted from How Good is Our Play for Learning from the Forth Valley and West Lothian Regional Improvement Collaborative. It shows how quality interactions, experiences and spaces can be developed through each of the three learning contexts

Interactions

The social environment of **interactions** should provide children with opportunities to continue to develop positive relationships with others; whilst also supporting and developing an understanding of **the notion of boundaries; self-regulation, negotiation and choice.** As the complexity of the child's play develops, learning should be facilitated through a cyclical process of **responsive and intentional planning. This should include observations, interpretation and documentation of learning,** and **facilitation** in order to extend children's thinking.

The following statements carry across all three contexts of Adult-led, Adult-initiated and Child-led learning as they underpin the foundations of play pedagogy within each environment:

- Interactions are playful, nurturing, positive, relevant and focussed on enhancing learning
- Adults support children as enthusiastic and motivated lifelong learners, developing the four capacities of a Curriculum for Excellence.
- Adults ensure they only intervene where and when appropriate to move learning forwards
- Adults regularly reflect on the impact of the learning and their own interactions with children
- Adults step in to reassure, give unspoken encouragement and provide children with quiet, unassuming support if overcome with uncertainty
- There are opportunities for play to be limitless and allows learners to develop at their own pace supported by adults and peers
- Adults skilfully scaffold learning through 'think alouds' and open questions or musings when intervention is required

Adult-led	Adult-initiated	Child-led
Adults <u>focus</u> children's thinking.	**Adults <u>fathom</u> children's thinking.**	**Adults <u>follow</u> children's thinking.**
o Adults value children as agents in their own right; actively listening to them and acting upon what they hear. o Effective non-verbal communication and tone of voice are used by the adult to ensure interactions are positive, purposeful and reciprocal. o Adults are attuned to each child, listening carefully to them and responding to their unique needs and interests. o Adult-child interactions build effectively on, or scaffold the children's existing knowledge, understanding and spoken language. o During adult-led / directed experiences, the adult leads the interactions around planned objectives / outcomes and stays with children whilst learning takes place. o Adult led / direct teaching is developmentally appropriate and flexible o Adults are responsive to children's learning dispositions needs and interests.	o The adult provides an activity, provocation or stimulus which acts as a starting point in order to solve problems, try out new theories and develop new skills. o Adults provide rich opportunities for children to work independently or collaboratively. o **WAIT** – Is the child progressing on their own? o **WATCH** – What is the child trying to achieve? o **WONDER** – How have they arrived at this line of enquiry? o **WHAT** – What could I provide to extend future learning? o Adults make judgements on when a shift in learning is required. Through scaffolding, explaining, informing or posing problems to extend thinking. o Adults are skilled at enticing reluctant learners to interact and engage in learning. o Adults can join play but should follow the child's lead where possible. They use interactions and observations to strengthen and deepen trusting relationships.	o True play is owned by children themselves; they lead it, drive it forward and react to experiences, spaces and resources. They take control of the time and outcomes. o Children engage individually or in self-chosen groups during their self-guided investigation and explorations. o Children develop self-awareness and understanding of their world by pondering, imagining, wondering, and revisiting real life situations during play. o Children are relaxed genuine, natural and respectful with each other, and with warm and attentive adults. o Children are learning to communicate their ideas, thoughts and feelings through holding meaningful conversations, explaining, suggesting, reasoning, and negotiating through child-led play. o Children are confident in self-directing their play, they respect boundaries, negotiate and are resilient. o Children may notice the available adult during play, choose to ask questions to consolidate their ideas or invite into play as a partner, to share an experience.

The following has been adapted from How Good is Our Play for Learning from the Forth Valley and West Lothian Regional Improvement Collaborative. It shows how quality interactions, experiences and spaces can be developed through each of the three learning contexts

Experiences

To support cognitive development the learning environment should be **rich in opportunities** for children to engage with concepts and **foster skills for learning, such as reasoning, creativity and problem solving.** The choice of **experiences** on offer should reflect an environment of open-ended possibilities in which children can feel **intrinsically motivated to explore and investigate through play - including taking calculated risks and learning from mistakes.**

The following statements carry across all three contexts of Adult-led, Adult-initiated and Child-led learning, as they underpin the foundations of play pedagogy within each environment.
- Adults have adopted a child's curriculum – a child-centred outdoor, indoor curriculum delivered through play pedagogy.
- Adults understand that each child arrives at school with a different relationship with 'Play' and model play individually.
- Adults balance the time they themselves spend observing and engaging in child-initiated, adult-led and adult-initiated playful experiences, and plan appropriately for all.
- Children's interests and playful learning remain central to the potential learning outcomes.
- Digital pedagogies are embedded.

Adult-led	Adult-initiated	Child-led
Adults <u>focus</u> children's thinking.	**Adults <u>fathom</u> children's thinking.**	**Adults <u>follow</u> children's thinking.**
o Adults recognise the immense value of Play and promote learners 'Right to Play' within curriculum delivery. o Children are actively engaged in their learning. o Adults use children's natural dispositions for learning and prior experiences to plan responsive, playful and motivating learning episodes. o Adult led learning is short, sharp and focussed to introduce new and specific concepts and skills. o Adults differentiate experiences to secure the progression of each child across the totality of their learning and development. o Adults reflect on significant observations to enhance and improve their approaches to teaching and learning, to surprise, personalise, mesmerise, energise and to inspire wonder.	o Adults' knowledge of learners is crucial to providing experiences that will optimise children's learning. o Target tasks are planned and utilise open-ended resources. o Target tasks motivate and challenge children to sustain a high level of thinking, practice new skills and extend learning. o Adults are skilled at enticing reluctant learners to interact and engage in learning. o Homework tasks can revisit, reinforce or extend adult initiated learning. o Adults respond, teaching in the moment, using observations to build on children's strengths to plan meaningful next steps in learning. o Children engage in adult and child co-constructed experiences. o Adults show they value play by joining in. o Adults give children time and resources to practice, rehearse, repeat and revisit learning through play.	o Adults value child led play. Time for this is planned for and protected. o Self-directed approaches are viewed as an integral part of the day where children initiate and demonstrate mastery and control of their learning. o Children demonstrate high levels of engagement, are relaxed and appear happy (Leuven Scale). o Children facilitate and celebrate individual lines of enquiry during this true, self-directed study. o Children bond together, for a shared purpose. They develop social skills such as empathy and inclusivity, disagreeing and compromising in a way that is productive, meaningful and successful. o The fear of failure is removed, as importance is placed on process over outcome. o Children can experiment and test hypotheses by applying skills and previously taught concepts in a relaxed manner. o Children understand that they learn through making mistakes. o Children self-select play resources to structure their own active play, to assess risk, learn respect and keep safe. o Children have ownership of resources and space.

The following has been adapted from How Good is Our Play for Learning from the Forth Valley and West Lothian Regional Improvement Collaborative. It shows how quality interactions, experiences and spaces can be developed through each of the three learning contexts

Spaces

As previously mentioned, designing learning environments requires consideration of the **interactions**, **experiences** and **spaces** on offer. Physical **spaces**, both outside and indoors, should be constantly reviewed to incorporate a wide range of **responsive, familiar, and exciting** new play opportunities. **Notice** how the children interact with their environment and **respond to their interests and use of their spaces.**

The following statements carry across all three contexts of Adult-led, Adult-initiated and Child-led learning, as they underpin the foundations of play pedagogy within each environment.

- Play is valued by all.
- Spaces are set up to empower children's curiosity, creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, and communication.
- Adults and children reflect on their significant observations, to plan relevant environmental changes.
- Adult-led learning is delivered in parallel with adult initiated and child-led play.
- Spaces and routines within the environment are flexible to allow for shorter or extended periods of play as appropriate.
- The environment is warm, welcoming and nurturing enabling children to develop a sense of self and belonging.
- Opportunities for outdoor learning and the use of spaces out with the classroom are maximised.

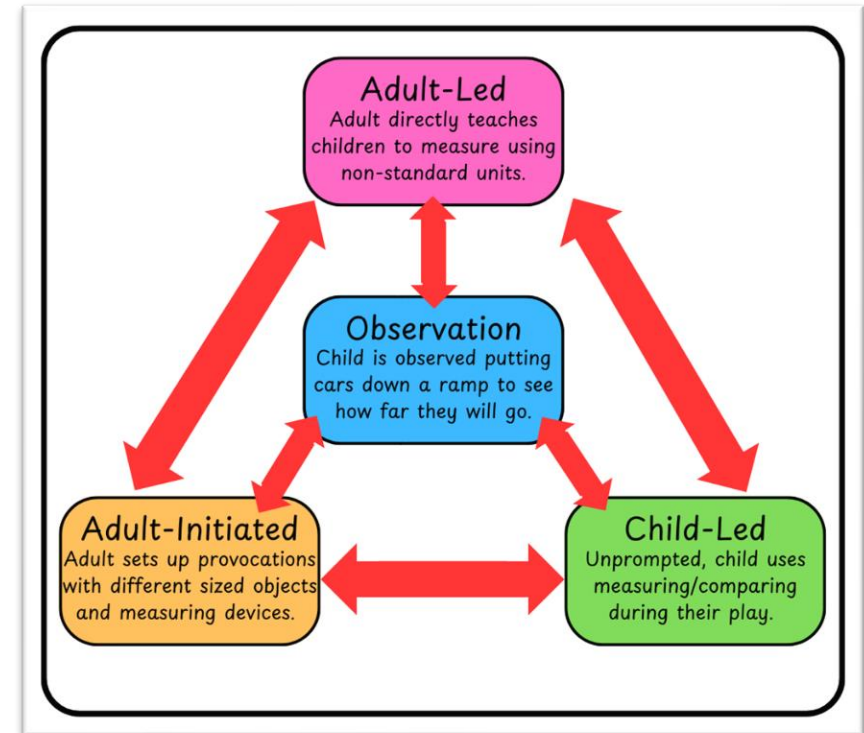| Adult-led	Adult-initiated	Child-led (both outdoors and Indoors).
Adults focus children's thinking.	**Adults fathom children's thinking.**	**Adults follow children's thinking.**
o Adults harness the school values within the spaces. They model kindness and respect and support and encourage children to do the same. o Adult-led spaces remain consistent with child-centred play pedagogy, e.g. spaces created for small groups. o Adults ensure the space is welcoming, authentic, aesthetically pleasing, culturally representative of diverse family and community, and embraces nature. o Adults ensure there are open spaces, opportunities for music, soft lighting, rest areas, a wide range of objects, stimulating materials and loose parts to inspire curiosity. o Visuals and meaningful wall displays are used to aid positive relationships, effective communication and support learning. o Children's learning and achievements are made visible e.g., on wall displays, in floor books. o Adults ensure children have regular access to outdoor spaces for play and learning. o Adults and children share and celebrate their experiences. and learning from, and within home and the community. o Adults reflect with children to plan improvements to the spaces. o Adults use a variety of spaces, both indoors and outdoors, for adult-led learning experiences i.e. 'teaching' does not always take place at a teaching table.	o Adults provide an environment to support and challenge by providing open-ended provocations to spark interests and aid exploration and enquiry. o Spaces are well organised, flexible and responsive to enhance flow, interdisciplinary learning and promote children's application of new learning. o Spaces are communication and language, maths and numeracy rich. o Spaces are reflective of current learning and offer new provocations. o Spaces are co-constructed between adult and child. o Adults are mind-minded and attuned to notice how individuals and groups of children are using spaces. o Open-ended resources are added and removed at appropriate times to support, challenge and extend children's learning. o Open-ended resources allow for intentional and unintentional learning opportunities. o Children are encouraged to record their learning and celebrate success. o Spaces allow for different types of play and encourage both physically active and quiet, calm play both indoors and outdoors.	o The space will give children the opportunity to develop essential life skills; creativity, problem solving, self-help and digital skills. o Spaces should include a rich variety of new and familiar textures, colours, shapes, sizes and origins to enable children to find the extraordinary in the ordinary. o The environment influences the nature of interactions and allows the adult and child to share a context. o Spaces support and empower children to be in control of their own learning. o The space offers children home from home comforts. o Children are encouraged to revisit learning, map events and real-life experiences through role play, malleable play, social play, sensory play and risky play. o With learner's permission, work can be shared and celebrated when the class is together again, which will boost individual confidence and wellbeing as well as inspire their peers. o Spaces, both outdoors and indoors have designated areas that children can go to, if they find the environment overwhelming. o Spaces are adaptive and responsive to children's emotions, interests and needs. o Displays reflect play in progress, creations may be displayed to celebrate and inspire. Learners may also revisit their creations and develop further.

Assessment and Observation

Assessment and observation are key components to any approach to learning and teaching and are integral parts of the continual learning, teaching and assessment cycle.

Summative assessments such as assessments of phonic knowledge or common words would be part of the ongoing assessments carried out during adult-led activities. Formative assessments would be ongoing through pupil learning conversations, peer and self-assessment, effective use of questioning and observation of play as it is happening.

Observation is particularly important in playful pedagogy because there is not necessarily an end point to assess such as a finished piece of work. Practitioners need to be skilled in observing children's play and knowing what learning or skills development is taking place and recording it appropriately. It takes thorough knowledge of the curriculum and of the skills children are developing to make accurate and useful assessments through observation and use these to support and enhance further planning.

Adult-Led
Adult directly teaches children to measure using non-standard units.

Observation
Child is observed putting cars down a ramp to see how far they will go.

Adult-Initiated
Adult sets up provocations with different sized objects and measuring devices.

Child-Led
Unprompted, child uses measuring/comparing during their play.

Practitioners should only record meaningful observation comments, focussing on how well or how much learning is taking place, not just a description of what the child is doing they need to be asking the question – so what?

The child-centred pedagogy in practice model from Realising the Ambition tells practitioners to "Listen with your eyes and ears." What does the child's actions, emotions and words tell you about their development and their learning? Yes, it is useful to know that they enjoy playing with the mud kitchen, but it is much more useful to notice the extent to which a child is curiously and creatively exploring how textures change when materials are mixed together. **Science > Materials > Properties of substances and their uses > SCN 0-15a.**

child-centred pedagogy in practice

observation, interpretation and documentation of learning

'Listen with your eyes and ears'

What does the child's **actions**, **emotions** and **words** tell you about their development and learning?

Are your methods of documentation informative and meaningful to **you, the child, their family** and **other practitioners**?

Sensitive interactions - honing the skill of stepping in and stepping back

Flexible experiences - learn from the child to inform practice

Variety of spaces - outdoors and inside

responsive and intentional planning

Informed by the child's **actions**, **emotions** and **words**

What needs to **stay** to reinforce development and learning?

What needs to **change** to inspire new learning and development?

facilitation

Useful observation templates and recording methods can be found in Appendix ?? Click here to view.

Section 4: Interactions, Experiences and Spaces

Interactions and the Role of the Adult

Quality interactions are key to supporting children through their play. Interactions which try to follow the child's lead and develop their thinking are key to achieving deeper learning. When adults immediately jump in with questions and unsolicited suggestions, it can break the flow and the thinking of the child becomes interrupted. Instead, when practitioners feel some intervention is required, using think alouds to scaffold ideas, or asking open ended questions can help to support the child's thinking without taking over and changing the agenda. VERP training which is offered throughout NLC can be a useful tool to help practitioners reflect on their interactions with children.

Quality interactions are also the focus of Realising the Ambition guidance which emphasises the importance of providing high-quality interactions, experiences and spaces. The West Partnership Regional Improvement Collaborative places the balance of the three learning contexts at the heart of the Realising the Ambition Model for Child-Centred Pedagogy.
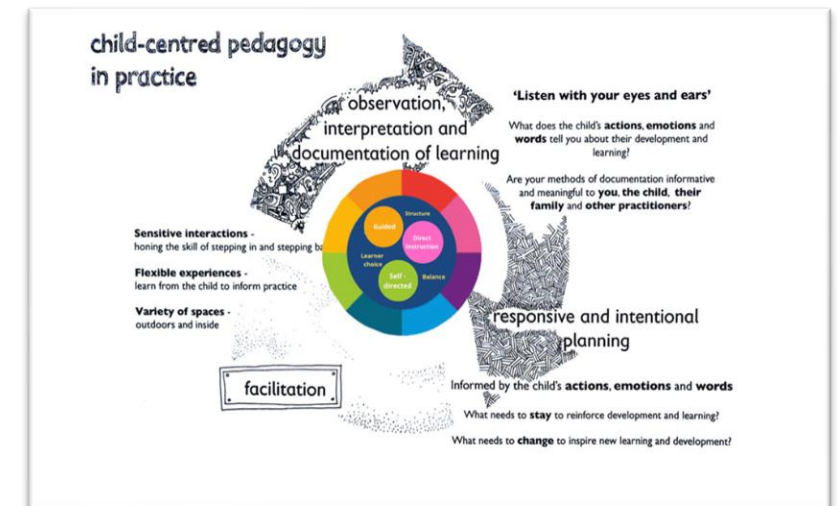

| Interactions | Experiences | Spaces | | |

Role of the Adult - Adult-Led Learning

The role of the adult during adult-led learning, is the role practitioners are most familiar with. This is the direct teaching of the skills and concepts that need to be specifically taught e.g. phonics or addition and subtraction. This may be a mixture of whole class input and group teaching. However, there are still opportunities even within the adult-led learning to make the pedagogy playful. SEAL for example by its very nature is a playful way to learn, moving and manipulating the concrete materials. An adult-directed game to reinforce taught concepts is playful. It is not free play but it is a playful way to engage the children at their level.
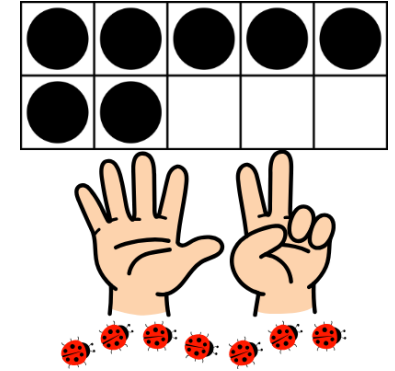
Role of the Adult - Adult-Initiated Learning

The role of the adult during adult-initiated learning, is to plan activities or experiences which build on children's current skills, understanding and interests. There is still a clear intended purpose to the activity or provocation that is put out. Will that experience allow children to deepen understanding of the concepts recently taught? Does it allow for exploration of next steps or to highlight children's misconceptions?

The children should be able to take part in these experiences independently while the adult is perhaps working with another group, but once the adult arrives, they should be using the opportunity to observe and understand where the children are with their learning. Has the intended learning taken place? If not, why not, where did it lead instead? Do they need to intervene to move the learning on or would that just interfere with the flow of the current learning? How will they record or evidence the learning? What will they plan next to enhance the learning further. In adult-initiated learning, the control of the learning is shared. Practitioners initiate the learning, but children take it on in the way they are motivated to do so.

Role of the Adult - Child-Led Learning

The role of the adult in child-led learning is similar to that of adult-initiated in that the adult should avoid intervening unless there is a valid reason to do so. Some children will need scaffolding to help them to explore resources and environments, but most will be happy that an adult is nearby taking an interest in the play and therefore providing it with importance.

Interactions

Experiences

Spaces

Fisher (2026) says practitioners should Wait, Watch and Wonder during play whether that be adult-initiated or child-led.

- Wait and do nothing to begin with. Children will often naturally invite the adult to join or comment on their learning with what they value rather than the adult jumping in with questions. When waiting it allows the practitioner a genuine opportunity to respond to the child's thinking.

- Watch includes active listening. It allows practitioners to observe relationships between children and whether these need support. It allows practitioners to see who is leading and who is following, who is fully engaged and who is on the periphery of the play. Watching allows practitioners to understand more fully the purpose of the activity the children are engaged in and then decide if intervention is required and how.

- Wonder reminds the practitioner to think about what the child is trying to achieve in order to understand what the child might need to stimulate the learning further. Asking themselves questions such as I wonder what…? I wonder why…? Helps to focus practitioners on understanding the child's thought processes and to support them appropriately.

- WAIT
- WATCH
- WONDER

Interactions   **Experiences**   **Spaces**

Symbolic Play · Locomotor Play · Recapitulative Play · Creative Play · Exploratory Play · Communication Play · Socio-dramatic Play · Role Play · Fantasy Play · Object Play · Mastery Play · Deep Play · Rough and Tumble Play · Dramatic Play · Social Play · Imaginative Play

Experiences

Types of Play

Play Scotland's document Types of Play (2017) exemplifies the work of Bob Hughes (2006) who identifies 16 types of play that children experience and that "engaging in each one is a necessary corollary for a child's healthy development." (Hughes, 2006) Practitioners then need to be aware of the different types of play, what they might look like and what kind of opportunities should be provided to allow for these types of play to be experienced.

An effective learning environment is not just the physical spaces, it is the totality of the interactions, experiences and spaces that our learners are provided with.

"To support cognitive development the learning environment should be rich in opportunities for children to engage with concepts and foster skills for learning, such as reasoning, creativity and problem solving. The choice of <u>experiences</u> on offer should reflect an environment of open-ended possibilities in which children can feel intrinsically motivated to explore and investigate through play - including taking calculated risks and learning from mistakes." (Realising the Ambition 2020, pg 47
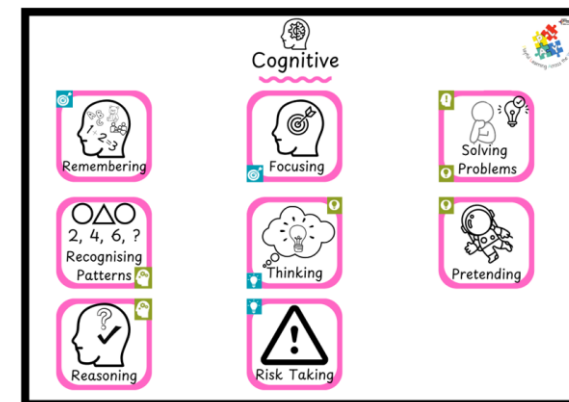
Interactions

Experiences

Spaces

Part of the planning for the experiences which practitioners provide should take account of the skills learners will develop through those experiences. Discussing skills with children and how they can practise and develop these should be part of play plenaries and they should be visibly displayed within the environment. SDS Scotland has developed a progression framework for the Meta Skills and has included a toolkit for younger children called Meta Skills Land.

NLC Learning Pathways have also been adapted to include natural links to skills development through the current curricular pathways. Highlighting how these skills are developed all the time, but learners might not be aware of them and what they mean so we should be more explicit in discussing skills development.

An expanded version of skills development for Early Level with pictorial representations and icons showing the links to the Meta Skills is included in the appendix. It shows some of the key skills being developed under the headings of cognitive, creative, social, physical and emotional skills. Click here or on the picture to go to the appendix.

Interactions

Experiences

Spaces

Spaces

The 'spaces' the children learn in should encourage independence, curiosity and creativity. Resources should be clearly labelled in an age-appropriate way and children should be taught to look after and take responsibility for their learning environment, tidying up and using equipment respectfully. The outdoor environment, where possible should be accessed as an extension to the indoor learning, some creativity may be required depending on the school building and the opportunities for outdoor access. A nearby forest area could be accessed on a regular basis if there are limited opportunities within the school grounds. Playing outdoors should include learning about responsibility for the environment and learning for sustainability.

"Playing outdoors enhances learning and is fundamental for children and young people to thrive in health, wellbeing and development. It is our shared responsibility to support and enable all of Scotland's children and young people to access our diverse greenspaces and natural landscapes and to empower them to enjoy these spaces for the purposes of playing and learning." (Scotland's Outdoor Play and Learning Coalition 2018)

Interactions   Experiences   Spaces

It is important to think of the space children are learning in as a changing environment which adapts to the needs and interests of the children and not just to look 'pretty' in the eyes of the adult. Since all classrooms have limited space, it is important to be mindful and selective about the resources and pieces of furniture that are put in. What is their purpose? Can they be used in an open, multifunctional way or is there only one purpose that that object can be used for and how valuable is that purpose?

Consider tables and chairs. Traditionally, children would each have a seat at a desk and would stay there for much of the day. There are advantages to this; some children like to know this is their own space and are comfortable with the boundary of it, some children appreciate knowing exactly where to head to when they enter the classroom. Sitting at a desk is a good position to write in or to manipulate table-top toys and games. Some disadvantages are that they take up a lot of space and young children are not necessarily ready to sit down for prolonged periods of time. Allowing children to stand, move around freely and work with objects at a variety of heights allows them to develop core strength, strengthen muscles, develop their balance and vestibular system and improve coordination. Research has shown that sitting for prolonged periods of time can lead to health problems such as obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease. It also leads to poor posture and in children can lead to difficulties in developing gross motor skills, coordination and balance.

Interactions

Experiences

Spaces

Children who are encouraged to move and explore their bodies develop better cognitive function, emotional regulation and overall health and wellbeing. Research has also shown that physical activity can enhance cognitive function and improve academic performance. (The Curiosity Approach – Freedom to Move) It is therefore useful to reflect on items like tables and chairs and on how many are needed in our spaces to best meet the needs of the children.

As mentioned previously, equipment or toys that only have one clear purpose (e.g. a superhero figure, jigsaw or an electronic game) are not as useful to have in our spaces as open-ended objects that can be used in whatever ways children imagine. That doesn't mean that there should never be these closed-ended toys but consider the balance when making use of limited space. Open-ended resources, often known as loose parts, allow children to use their imagination to make them into anything they want. A stick can be a wand, a light sabre, a sword, a fishing rod, an oar or many more things. This imaginative play develops children's creativity, problem solving, social and communication skills as well as building their confidence and allowing them to experiment and explore their thinking. (Play Scotland Loose Parts leaflet) An example of possible Loose Parts is included in the appendix.

Interactions

Experiences

Spaces

Zones/Areas

It can be useful to think of providing zones within the classroom for example Discovery Zone, Social Zone, Creative Zone and Outdoor Zone. These are just suggestions and literacy, and numeracy opportunities should be present throughout each area. Specific details on what might be present in each of the zones are included in appendix 1, click on the table to jump to appendix 1.

The Discovery Zone	The Social Zone
Construction Materials Sand Tray Water Tray	Home Corner Other Role Play Areas Library/Reading Area Small World Play
The Creative Zone	**The Outdoor Zone**
Art and Craft Materials Music and Dance Tinker Table	Same Zones can be outdoor Outdoor Loose Parts Opportunities for risky play

Interactions

Experiences

Spaces

Playful Learning Across the Years (P.L.A.Y.) Audit Tool

This audit will help you identify areas for development and strengths of your practice in Play Pedagogy. It will support you to identify next steps in your play journey. It can also be used to measure and compare practice before and after a focus for improvement.

Click on the logo to open the audit.

Appendix 1 - Zone and Area Suggested Materials

The Discovery Zone

Construction

- Construction materials such as Lego, K'nex, Kapla, loose parts such as blocks and planks, magnetic shapes, pipes and connectors, robotic or electronic elements, gears, pulleys etc.
- Tools and equipment e.g. basic hand tools, measuring tools such as tapes, programmable robots, circuit components, Microbits, 3D printer pens.
- STEM tools or kits e.g. magnifying glass, microscope, electronic kits, chemistry kits, physics kits, renewable energy kits, coding kits or games that teach coding skills.
- Reference books and resources e.g. STEM related books- science, maths, computing related books and magazines
- Software and digital resources e.g. iPads with apps for programming and coding, online platforms for games related to maths and science or coding, YouTube channels or links to experiments

Sand and Water

- STEM Materials e.g. Measuring cups, beakers, and graduated cylinders, funnel sets, sifters and sieves, magnifying glasses or microscopes, thermometers, plastic tubes or pipes, waterwheels or turbines, water pumps or syringes.
- Language and Literacy resources e.g. water-resistant picture books or laminated cards for reading and storytelling near the water area. Writing materials like clipboards, waterproof markers, and paper for recording observations and discoveries.
- Natural Materials and Additives e.g. shells, rocks, or pebbles, twigs, leaves, flowers, sand-friendly toys like diggers, sieves, or moulds for creative play. Coloured sand or water-safe dyes for experimenting with colour mixing and patterns. Waterproof mirrors or reflective surfaces for observing reflections and light refraction.
- Water Play Enhancements e.g. tater tables or tubs with adjustable heights or draining options for various experiment setups. Water pumps or fountains, floating objects or boats, water timers or hourglasses.
- STEM and Language Resources e.g. STEM-themed books or magazines related to water, sand, engineering, or natural sciences. Scientific experiment books or guides for hands-on projects and investigations. Informational resources about water ecosystems, geology, or environmental topics. Digital resources like educational apps or websites offering STEM-based water or sand activities.
- Safety and Maintenance e.g. aprons or smocks to protect clothing during water and sand play, non-slip mats or trays to contain spills and promote safe play, sponges, towels, or mops for cleanup and maintenance, water-safe sanitisers or cleaners for maintaining hygiene in the area.

Appendix 1 - Zone and Area Suggested Materials

The Social Zone

Home Corner

- Play Kitchen.
- Cooking and Baking Supplies.
- Grocery and food items.
- Writing and reading materials.
- STEM materials such as magnifying glasses, scales, measuring tapes, tools.
- Technology Integration: age-appropriate technology such as tablets or interactive kitchen appliances. Digital resources can provide opportunities for children to explore cooking-related apps, watch educational videos, or engage in virtual cooking experiences that reinforce literacy, maths, and scientific concepts.
- Recycling Centre: designated area for recycling bins or containers, along with materials such as cardboard, paper, and plastic bottles to encourage environmental awareness, sorting skills, and discussions about sustainability.
- Home related props to provide familiarity and comfort e.g. seating, pillows, blankets, stuffed animals, baby doll etc.
- Communication tools e.g. telephone.
- Safety and Hygiene Materials e.g. oven mitts, aprons, and safe cleaning supplies.

Other role-play areas

- Themes and topic related based on children's interest e.g. café, vet, post office, shop, hospital, space station.
- Props and materials related to the theme, always include writing materials.
- Role-play – encourage children to take own different roles and scenarios.
- Language and communication – encourage use of topic specific vocabulary.
- Cooperative play – include props that encourage cooperation and multiple children.
- Bring in related areas of the curriculum e.g. maths and money if shop or health and wellbeing - medicines and safety if vet or hospital.

Small World Area

- Assorted small world figures e.g. people, animals, and objects. Small vehicles such as cars, trains, boats, or airplanes. Loose parts e.g. fabric, building blocks, rocks, sticks, playdough or modelling clay for creating scenery, features or landmarks. Natural materials like sand, gravel, or leaves for sensory experiences and landscape textures.
- Maps, globes, atlases – age-appropriate atlases and resources about the world and cultures. Jigsaws of for example famous landmarks or historical places or events.
- Books and magazines of different countries and cultures, travel guides or pictures from other countries. Books about folk tales, fairy tales, myths and legends.
- Writing materials such as picture cards, notebooks, paper, pens.
- Language and Vocabulary Resources: Word cards with vocabulary related to different cultures, countries, or historical periods. Multilingual dictionaries or tools to explore words and phrases in different languages. Language learning resources or games to introduce basic phrases in different languages.

- Cultural Artifacts and Music: Artifacts or crafts representing different cultures, such as masks, traditional clothing, or musical instruments. World music CDs or playlists featuring music from different regions or cultures. Postcards or images showcasing famous artworks or cultural symbols.
- Digital Resources: Educational websites or apps that provide virtual tours, interactive activities, or cultural information. Online videos or documentaries about different cultures, landmarks, or historical events. Virtual reality (VR) or augmented reality (AR) experiences that allow children to explore places and cultures virtually.

Reading Area

- Books – age-appropriate books covering a wide range of themes, topics and cultures
- Age-appropriate magazines and newspapers
- Reference materials such as dictionaries, encyclopaedias, atlases,
- Support materials such as bookmarks, stuffed toys to read to, coloured overlays if needed etc.
- Digital resources such as eBooks, audible books etc.
- Writing materials
- Literacy games e.g. common word games, junior scrabble or Bananagrams, board or card games
- Comfortable environment e.g. cushions, books displayed on shelves of various heights etc.

Appendix 1 - Zone and Area Suggested Materials

The Creative Zone
Art Area
- Paints, brushes, pencils, pens, charcoal, chalk, playdough, clay, print making materials, different sizes and colours of paper, card, collage materials, mood boards to inspire with colour, artists, techniques etc.
- Scissors, rulers, glue, tape, beads, buttons and feathers. Fabric and wool scraps, lolly sticks, empty boxes and tubes, sewing and threading materials
- Sewing equipment, e.g. threads, aida fabric, plastic needles, sewing machines
- Technology and Digital tools – iPads or digital devices to take pictures or videos. Stop motion animation apps. Links or tutorials for techniques and creative ideas.
- Reference books and pictures of famous artists and their work, their style or technique.

Music/Dance Area

- Space to move to music
- Headphones and devices to listen to music
- Simple Instruments or noise makers
- QR codes linked to dances/performances suitable for children

Malleable Materials
- Playdoh
- Clay
- Salt dough
- Cutters, rollers, tools

Writing Table
- Variety of writing materials
- Variety of formats e.g. paper, notebooks
- Examples as stimulus e.g. postcards, letters, lists, books

Tinker Table
- Woodworking materials if appropriate
- Parts of machines or opened machines like an old DVD player or computer with chips etc exposed, keyboards, old phones
- Wires, cables, clips
- Simple hand tools like screwdrivers, hammers, wrench, pliers, magnifying glasses
- Hi-vis vest, goggles, hard hat, gloves
- Measuring tapes, spirit levels
- Scraps of wood, wheels, lollipop sticks
- Nuts, bolts, screws, nails, washers
- String, elastic bands, cable ties

Appendix 1 – Zones/Areas

Appendix 2 – Loose Parts

Appendix 3 - Skills

Appendix 1 - Zone and Area Suggested Materials

The Outdoor Zone

- Large loose parts such as tree logs, wooden blocks, plastic or wooden crates, pipes, hoses, wheels, planks, pipe connectors, half pipes, ropes, tarpaulin or fabric, ramps, hoops.
- Garden equipment such as tools and gloves, planters, digging areas.
- Water play area with range of objects.
- Mud kitchen
- Risky Play opportunities e.g. climbing, swinging and balancing.
- Sports and Physical equipment such as balls, bikes, scooters, roller skates, skipping ropes, hula hoops etc.
- STEM and exploration materials e.g. magnifying glasses, bug collectors, identification charts, compasses, birdhouses or bird feeders, bug hotels, weather instruments such as rain gauge or windsock.
- Outdoor musical instruments or equipment that can make noise such as pans and spoons
- Natural materials to play with and collect or sort such as leaves, pebbles, sticks

Appendix 1 – Zones/Areas

Appendix 2 – Loose Parts

Appendix 3 - Skills

Appendix 2 – Loose Parts Ideas

Natural Loose Parts		Creative Messy Play	Metal	Wood	Household Items		Building Materials
Acorns	Mud	Beads	Baking Trays	Building Blocks	Basin	Empty Milk	Cable Ties
Bamboo	Clay	Bottle Tops	Bottle tops	Curtain Rings	Basket	Bottles	Guttering and
Earth	Water	Cardboard Boxes	CDs	Dolly Pegs	Blankets	Empty Cans	Pipes
Feathers	Bark	Cotton Wool	Cooking Utensils	Wooden Pegs	Buckets	(check edges are	Gravel
Leaves	Seed Pods	Corks	Muffin Tins	Driftwood	Cardboard	safe)	Hammer and
Mud	Dried flowers,	Glass Stones	Spoons	Pastry Brush	Clothes Pegs	Jugs	Nails
Pinecones	berries, leaves	Glue	Pots	Spoons	Foam Sponges	Teapots	Hose
Pebbles	Moss	Googly Eyes	Lids	Lolly Sticks	Ice Cube Trays	Empty Picture	Milk Crates
Sand	Fruit stones e.g.	Glitter	Chains	Wooden bowls or	Lampshades	Frames	Paint Brush
Shells	peach	Greetings Cards	Pipes	Plates	Lego		Planks of Wood
Sticks	Cinnamon Sticks	Paint and Brushes	Joints	Wooden cotton	Magnets		Sand
Stones	Star Anise	Pipe Cleaners		reels	Potato Masher		Tarpaulin
Tree Stumps	Dried orange slices	Pom Poms		Twigs	Pillows		Tyres
Twigs	Corn Kernels	Sponges		Stumps	Sieves		Washers
Branch slices		Wrapping Paper		Branch Slices	Sheets		Screws
Seeds		Yoghurt Pots			Shoe Polish Tins		Bolts
Dried Beans, Rice		Different Papers			Trays		Cogs
and Pulses		and Card			Vinyl Records		Rope
Straw Bales		Paint Sample			Washing up Brush		String
Long Grass		Cards			Plastic Pots		
Reeds					Buttons		
Sand					Dried Pasta		
Soil							

Appendix 1 – Zones/Areas

Appendix 2 – Loose Parts

Appendix 3 - Skills

Sensory Materials	Others	Warning
Cotton Wool Hessian Netting Felt Ribbon Silk Shoelaces Tin Foil Velcro Rollers Wool Fabric Scraps Ice and Snow Ice with loose parts frozen in it Cinnamon Sticks	Chalk Plastic Bottles and Tops Hula Hoops Wallpaper Samples Corks Marbles Tires	**Always be mindful of the risks associated with loose parts. The risk of choking, sharp edges, allergies etc. should be risk assessed.**

Appendix 3 – Skills Pictorial Cards

Early Level Skills

Cognitive	Physical	Creative	Social	Emotional
Remembering	Cutting	Drawing	Sharing	Naming Feelings
Focusing	Drawing	Writing	Listening	Describing Feelings
Solving Problems	Folding	Inventing	Speaking Clearly	Resolving Conflicts
Recognising Patterns	Jumping	Building	Taking Turns	Resilience
Thinking	Balancing	Designing	Being Gentle	Self-Control
Pretending	Climbing	Experimenting	Good Manners	Empathy
Reasoning	Running	Modelling	Personal Space	Confidence
Risk Taking	Throwing	Storytelling	Eye Contact	
	Squeezing	Asking questions	Teamwork	
	Pinching	Curiosity		

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Appendix 1 – Zones/Areas

Appendix 2 – Loose Parts

Appendix 3 - Skills