




The #SBCway

## Playful and enquiring pedagogy

An SBC-wide approach

 This document provides an overview of the #SBCway to play and enquiring learning. It answers 4 key questions:

- 1) [Why playful, enquiring pedagogy?](#)
- 2) [What makes for successful playful, enquiry learning?](#)
- 3) [What should highly effective play and enquiry look like?](#)
- 4) [What support is available?](#)

### **Why playful, enquiring pedagogy?**

Playful, enquiring learning is fundamental for skills development. Through playful pedagogy, enquiry, creativity and problem solving, children and young people enhance their skills for learning, skills for life.

*“Playful Pedagogy puts play experience as central to learning, giving pupils the flexibility to find their own solutions to both new and existing problems. It engages children and young people in personally meaningful activities, learning about themselves and others and encourages autonomy and motivation.”* Playful Pedagogy Toolkit; Play Scotland, 2020

Playful, enquiry learning is a highly effective approach to develop meta skills across all stages of the school which provides opportunities for learners to develop Self-Management, Social Intelligence and Innovation.

A skill-based approach is a context for learning that:

- allows for the expression of personality and uniqueness
- enhances dispositions such as curiosity and creativity
- enables children to make connections between prior experiences and new learning
- assists children to develop relationships and concepts
- stimulates and gives sense of wellbeing

Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) creates a specific right for all children to have rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to their age and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

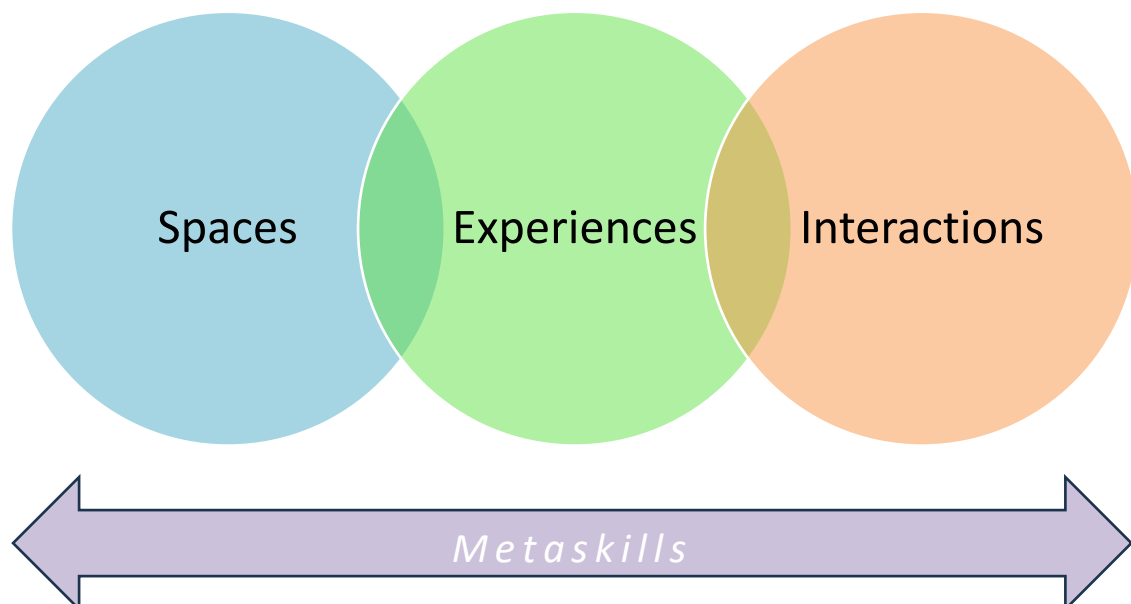
## What makes for successful playful, enquiry learning?

Getting it right through play (and enquiry)...



Play Types Toolkit: Play Scotland 2017

In practice, this is best achieved when we plan for and consider 3 key components and resulting *Metaskills*:



## Spaces

Consideration of the physical space available and using these effectively and efficiently is a precursor to successful playful, enquiring learning.

### Essential

- ✓ Resources must be well organised and labelled for children to access and tidy independently. Resources must be levelled (for support and challenge opportunities) in all physical spaces.
- ✓ Must have open-ended / creative resources e.g. loose parts and natural resources.
- ✓ Should include regular access to outdoor spaces including beyond the gates i.e. the local community.
- ✓ Must have access to digital resources.

### Desirable

- Make learning visible through interactive and meaningful learning walls.
- Make sure that the environment is communication friendly and does not over stimulate children with bright colours, artificial light and excess noise levels.

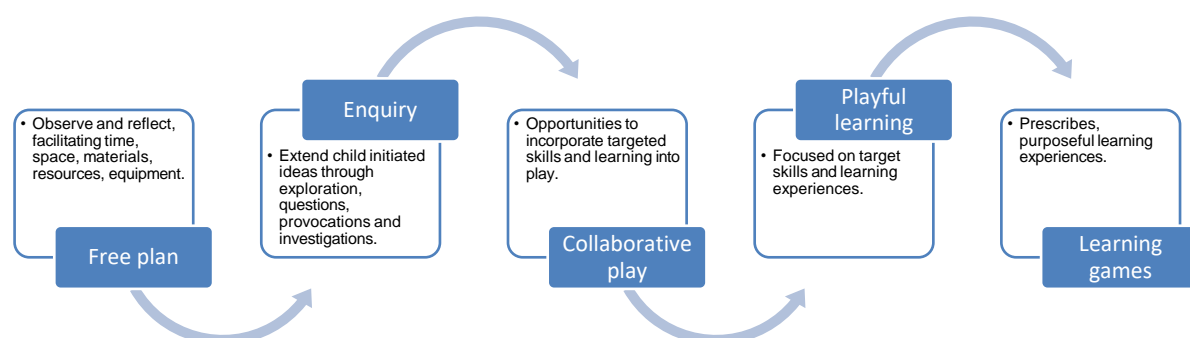
## Experiences

The playful, enquiring experiences that our children and young people should enjoy should consider:

- ✓ Developmentally appropriate pedagogy, progressing from playful to enquiring.
- ✓ The leader of the learning, be that the pupil and/or the adult.
- ✓ Contexts for learning, including use of the outdoors, STEM, digital and expressive arts.

### *Developmentally appropriate pedagogy*

The following continuum, adapted from Pyle & Danniels (2017), provides an interesting take on the developmental nature of play/enquiry, showing the gradual move from 'pure play' to playing games that dictate the play.



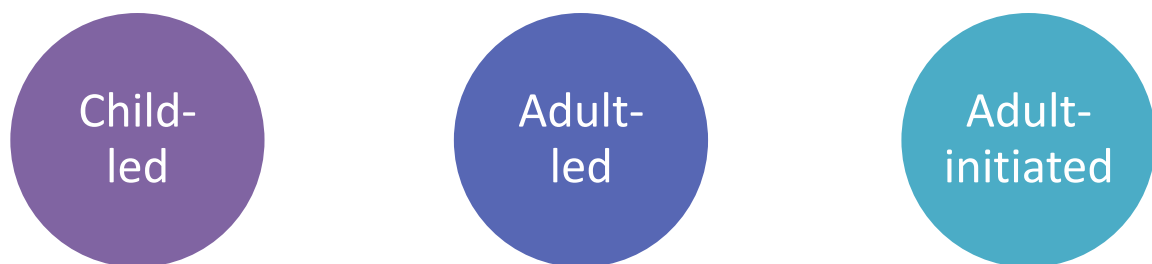
*Adapted from Pyle & Danniels (2017) — “A Continuum of Play-Based Learning: The Role of the Teacher in Play-Based Pedagogy and the Fear of Hijacking Play”*

For the purposes of our own pedagogy and practice, the following development pathway can be helpful:



As children mature and develop, so too must the pedagogy that supports their learning. To begin, play should be the primary driver of learning, supported by a strong and continuous provision of playful opportunities alongside intentional promotion. As learners progress, play continues to serve as a supportive pedagogy, with a greater emphasis on intentional, curriculum-linked play. Moving on, pedagogy should increasingly centre on an enquiry-based approach, fostering curiosity across the curriculum. Beyond this, young people should be encouraged and supported to adopt an 'enquiring stance' toward all aspects of learning, with growing opportunities to develop criticality and creativity.

#### *The leader of the learning*



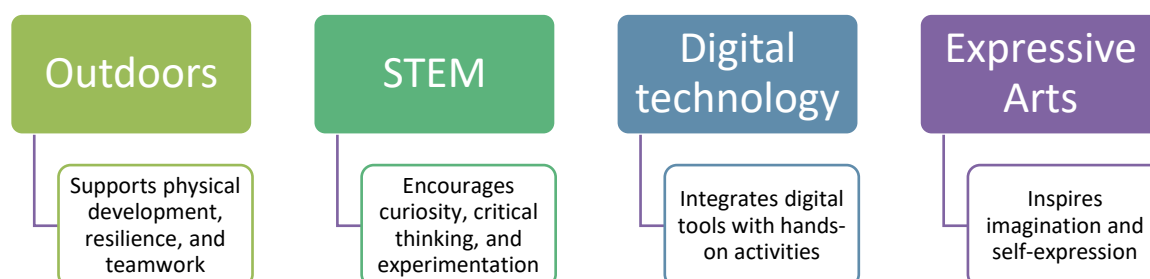
**Child-led** learning is driven by children's independent choices and interests, with learners freely accessing resources and directing their own experiences. The adult's role is to observe, follow the child's lead, and intervene only to scaffold or extend learning through open-ended questioning and thoughtful support. When a common theme or interest emerges across the group, this can inform intentional future planning.

**Adult-led** learning involves direct teaching, either as whole-class gatherings or focused small group sessions. These are intentionally planned based on children's interests, formative assessments (e.g., developmental overviews, literacy and numeracy trackers), or individual needs outlined in pupil plans. The adult assumes the lead role in content delivery and guides the learning with specific outcomes in mind.

**Adult-initiated** learning begins with the adult setting up provocations or invitations to explore, often linked to planned learning intentions. While the adult initiates the environment or context, the learning is co-constructed through observations, skilled interactions, and responsive teaching that extends children's thinking and development.

## Contexts for learning

Playful, enquiring learning should permeate the curriculum and not be an 'extra' or 'special' experience. To best enable this, other contexts for learning should be utilised as vehicles for playful, enquiring experiences. This could include, but is not restricted to:



## Interactions

As adults, we have a responsibility to create and foster an environment that is psychologically safe. Psychological safety means feeling safe to take interpersonal risks, to speak up, to disagree openly, to surface concerns without fear of negative repercussions. This positive environment is created, in part, through quality interactions. Such interactions are adult<>pupil, pupil<>pupil and adult<>adult.

All interactions in our schools and settings should build psychological safety. But when planning for playful, enquiring learning, psychological safety is particularly important to ensure children and young people feel safe to be curious and creative.

The following checklist should guide all playful, enquiry interactions:

- ☐ We interact in a nurturing, positive and supporting manner.
- ☐ We use (and model) open-ended, thought-provoking questions.
- ☐ We ask for and give feedback throughout an activity.
- ☐ We model new concepts, vocabulary and skills ("I do, we do, you do").
- ☐ We "wait, watch, wonder" to determine when to intervene.
- ☐ We intervene to scaffold and extend learning.
- ☐ We observe the skills, knowledge and understanding demonstrated.

## Metaskills

"Meta-skills are innate, timeless, higher-order skills that create adaptive learners; able to succeed whatever the future brings. From birth, children use and develop meta-skills as they test and explore the world around them. They provide the keys to unlock the acquisition of other transferable and technical skills. As children and young people progress through their education, it is essential that practitioners nurture and develop their meta-skills so they can navigate a world which is increasingly complex and unpredictable."

[Guide-to-meta-skills-across-the-curriculum.pdf](#) (Pg.3)

Skills Development, Scotland (SDS) have produced the Meta-Skills Framework to support the implementation of Meta-Skills from Early through to Fourth level. There are a number of useful resources to support practitioners to engage with the Meta-skills:



[Guidance](#)



[Progression](#)



[Lesson plans](#)





[Audits](#)

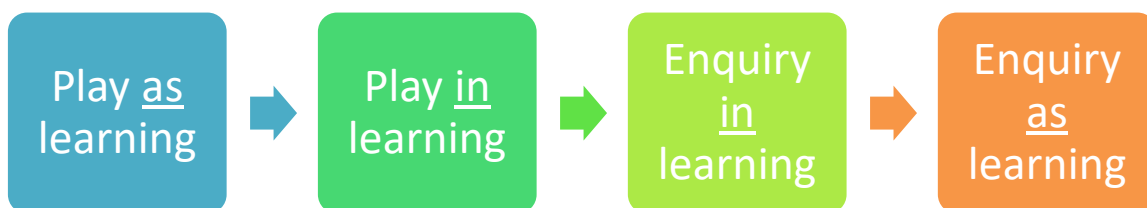


[Resources](#)

Of particular interest and relevance to playful, enquiry learning are 2 pupil-focused resources:

 <p>Meta Skills Land was created as a resource that could be used within a play-based context to support deeper learning about the concept of meta-skills, whilst offering opportunities to practice those skills</p> <p><a href="#">Find out more</a></p>	<p>Discover your <b>Profile Power</b> </p> <p>A digital space for people to document who they are, what they love and what they're striving for. It helps young people understand and articulate their achievements, skills, and learning—and ultimately showcase themselves.</p> <p><a href="#">Find out more</a></p>
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### What should highly effective play and enquiry look like?



Using this developmental model, we can unpick what play/enquiry might look like across the different ages and stages of our schools and settings.

To support the theoretical description of each phase, there is a [supporting Padlet](#) providing practical examples for the classroom.

The following 'core' and 'desirable' descriptors are provided as guiding examples and are not an exhaustive set of criteria.

**Play as learning > The foundational element highlighting how play is a powerful tool for learning and discovery.**

Core	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Environment rich in open ended materials to encourage curiosity and exploration</li><li>• Learning Intentions are embedded in play</li><li>• Child- led with adult observation and responsive support</li><li>• Emphasis on sensory, physical and imaginative play</li><li>• Evidence is captured through a variety of medial</li><li>• Opportunities for both indoor and outdoor experiences</li></ul>
Desirable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Adults revisit to extend learning</li><li>• Learning environments evolve in response to interests and emerging themes</li></ul>

**Play in learning > Incorporating playful activities to enhance the learning process, making it more engaging and enjoyable.**

Core	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Play activities planned with specific learning in mind</li><li>• A balance of child-initiated and adult guided play</li><li>• Clear links between play and Learning Intentions</li><li>• Use of provocations to promote inquiry and imagination</li><li>• Learners work with peers, developing communication and problem-solving skills</li><li>• Adults facilitate questioning and reflection of learning</li></ul>
Desirable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Making choices and sustained engagement</li><li>• Learners and talk about and explain their thinking and learning</li><li>• Play and provocations link to wider experiences</li></ul>

**Enquiry in learning > The importance of curiosity and investigation within a learning environment, promoting critical thinking and problem-solving skills.**
















Core	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use of enquiry-based stimuli, topics or projects</li><li>• Co-construct learning questions – “The Big Question”</li><li>• Learners are taught to plan investigations and research skills</li><li>• Projects are interdisciplinary</li><li>• Learning and reflections are supported and scaffolded</li></ul>
Desirable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Learners can talk confidently and independently about their learning</li><li>• Learners can plan and research their own investigations</li></ul>

**Enquiry as learning > The process of enquiry itself is the learning, developing understanding through exploration and discovery, driven by learners’ questions.**

Core	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Deep, sustained enquiry driven by interest</li><li>• Learners take ownership of the enquiry cycle; question, plan, investigate, present</li><li>• Strong emphasis on real world impact and interdisciplinary learning</li><li>• Learners supported to think critically and reflect on learning</li></ul>
Desirable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Learner voice and agency central to learning process</li><li>• Demonstration of critical thinking and reasoning skills</li><li>• Learning shared with a wider, external audience</li><li>• Independent reflect and evaluate learning</li></ul>



## What support is available?

SBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <a href="#">SBC Play/Enquiry Padlet</a></li> <li> <a href="#">SBC Early Years portal</a></li> <li> <a href="#">SBC STEM</a></li> <li> <a href="#">SBC Digital</a></li> <li> <a href="#">SBC Outdoor learning support</a></li> <li> <a href="#">SBC Expressive Arts support</a></li> </ul>
National	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <a href="#">Play Padlet</a></li> <li> <a href="#">Skills Development Scotland Metaskills Framework</a></li> <li> <a href="#">Education Scotland Play Toolkit (Early level)</a></li> <li> <a href="#">Play Scotland</a></li> <li> <a href="#">Daydream believers (Project learning)</a></li> </ul>
International	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <a href="#">PBLWorks (Project learning)</a></li> <li> <a href="#">Project Zero (Pedagogy of play)</a></li> </ul>
Professional reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>Durning, A., Baker, S., &amp; Ramchandani, P. (2024)</b> <i>Empowering play in primary education.</i> London: Routledge.</li> <li> <b>Simpson, M. (2023)</b> <i>Play by any other name: Embracing the play principles beyond the early years.</i></li> </ul>