

Learning About Play

Research Report Overview

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Scottish Out of School Care Network
supporting children's rights to play, care and learning.

Learning about Play in Scotland

“Learning about Play” (Audain and Shoolbread, 2015) investigated the play content of qualifications in Scotland, relevant to those working in early learning and childcare, schools, out of school and holiday services for children.

Results showed that play was covered in nearly every qualification, but it depended on the choices the learner made on optional units, to really cover play, child development and learning. We recommended child development should be a core not optional topic. Some qualifications needed other improvements, especially on rights and creativity.

It was found that play could be better provided in schools, in class and during breaks, with potential to improve children’s wellbeing and learning. Recommendations included teaching parents about the positive value of risk in play; play courses for teachers and doctoral level investment in play related qualifications.

Keywords: Learning, Play, Child Development, Childcare, Qualifications

Background

In 2014 the Scottish Out of School Care Network (SOSCN) was commissioned by the Scottish Government-led Play strategy Implementation Group to conduct an assessment of the play content of relevant training and qualifications for teachers, early learning and childcare, out of school care, childminders, playgroups and residential childcare settings in Scotland.

The resulting report: *Learning about Play* (Audain and Shoolbread, 2015) is an in-depth analysis of over 400 qualifications modules, contained in over 45 different qualifications; from entry to postgraduate level.

Scottish Context

Scotland is understood to have one of the most well-educated or qualified workforces in the world, so this is the context of the full range of qualifications from entry level 5 to Masters level, which specifically relate to this enquiry: “In

2013, Scotland had the highest proportion of usual residents aged 16 to 64 with an NVQ (National Vocational Qualification) Level 4 or equivalent and above qualification (Higher National Certificate, Higher National Diploma or degree level), at 39.4% (1.3 million)” (ONS, 2014) .

Changing Context

The enquiry was conducted during a period of substantial change in the content of teacher training courses in Scotland, with a move towards making the teaching profession qualified at masters’ level, and indeed, with a requirement that head teachers must hold or work towards this level in the next few years.

There was potential for changes in the childhood practice BA or degree level 9 qualifications, which were based on the Standard for Childhood Practice (QAA, 2007), revised in 2015 (SSSC, 2015).

Contextual Data

The report provided contextual data on the various workforces and the regulatory bodies which cover their registration, training, qualifications and codes of conduct. The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) regulates all teaching staff in Scotland and the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) regulates the childcare workforce, and sets out the qualifications they must acquire for their roles (not including childminders).

What follows is a summary of one of the main research questions, literature, analytical criteria, results, discussion, conclusion and recommendations.

Research Questions

The Scottish Government National Play Strategy for Scotland – Our Vision was published in June 2013 followed by an associated National Play Strategy for Scotland – Our Action Plan (2013a) in October 2013. In November 2013, the Play Strategy Implementation Group (PSIG) was set up to ensure delivery of actions within the plan. The research report relates primarily to Action 7.1 from this Action Plan–

“Task a working group to review current levels of play training provided to school and nursery staff and to recommend how elements of play rights, theory and practice could be incorporated in both the initial professional training and career long professional learning and leadership” (Scottish Government, 2013a, p.20).

In order: “to ensure that all education manager, school and centre leaders, school staff and early years practitioners are adequately trained on the importance of play and are able to support quality play opportunities in their setting,” (Scottish Government, 2013a. p.20).

The report also related to four additional action points from the plans, which are *not covered* in this article, except for:

9.8 “Investigate how the skills of the play workforce could be utilised more widely to develop quality of play opportunities in a range of other settings.” (Scottish Government, 2013a, p.32)

Strands of Work

The first main action point was divided into two main strands of work- only the first strand is covered here (the other was on non- qualification training courses). This strand was to look at how, and if play, is included and covered in formal qualifications for all professionals working with children within early years, education and childcare settings. The professional qualifications to be looked at relate to teachers; daycare of children (nursery, playgroup and out of school care) workers; residential childcare workers; pupil support assistants; childminders and play workers.

The main qualifications:

The qualifications discussed in the report are in the following tables which also show the higher education providers of the relevant courses of study.

Teaching Qualifications

They are, first, the qualifications required for teachers in Scotland who must also register with the General Teaching Council Scotland.

Scottish Social Services Council registration qualifications

The next two tables are the qualifications for those working in early learning and childcare, including school age childcare, which must also be registered with the Scottish Social Services Council (unless a registered teacher). There is also a fourth table on other qualifications which were of interest to this enquiry.

Worker categories

The categories of worker for registration with the Scottish Social Services Council are as follows:

- Manager/ Lead Practitioner is the worker in charge of the setting and staff in early learning and childcare, out of school care, playgroups, family centres
- Practitioner works directly with children and leads their care, play, learning and development – may also have supervision responsibilities to other staff
- Support Worker – works directly with children to provide care, play, learning activities – usually supervised

The Scottish Social Services Council (Children and Young People) set of three level qualifications has now replaced the set of Children's Care Learning and Development Qualifications, but they were included as they are held by many current staff.

Table 1: Teacher Training Courses in Scotland (25)

Institution	Bachelor of Arts Education	Postgraduate Diploma Education	Masters of Arts in Education or Masters Education
University of Aberdeen		PGDE Primary PGDE Gaelic medium	MA (Hons) Education

		PGDE Secondary	
University of Dundee		PGDE Primary PGDE Secondary	MA (Hons) Education MEd (for teachers)
University of Edinburgh		PGDE Primary PGDE Secondary	MA (Hons) & chosen field
University of Glasgow	BA Education (first part of Masters)	PGDE Primary PGDE Secondary	MA Education
University of Highlands & Islands		PGDE Primary	
University of Stirling	BA(Hons) Education		a research-informed degree in Professional Education with a teaching subject (or subjects) for secondary in 4 years
University of Strathclyde	BA(Hons) Education & chosen field	PGDE Primary PGDE Gaelic medium (in progress) PGDE Secondary	MA Education

University of West Scotland	BA Education & BA(Hons) Education & chosen field	PGDE Primary	
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Table 2: Required qualifications for Managers/Lead Practitioners (unless a registered trained teacher) (14).

Institution	Bachelor of Arts (BA)	BA (Hons)	Postgraduate Diploma/ Masters of Education
The University of Aberdeen	BA Childhood Practice	BA (Hons) Childhood Practice	
The University of Dundee	BA Childhood Practice		PGDip Childhood Practice
The University of Edinburgh	BA Childhood Practice		
The University of Glasgow	BA Childhood Practice		Med & PGDip Childhood Practice
The University of Highlands and Islands	BA Childhood Practice		
The University of Strathclyde	BA Childhood Practice	BA (Hons) Childhood Practice	
The University of the West of Scotland	BA Childhood Practice	BA (Hons) Childhood Practice	PGDip Childhood Practice

The Professional Development Award (PDA) at level 9 in Childhood Practice

This is delivered by a number of training partners; however, they must have accreditation from both Scottish Qualifications Authority and the Scottish Social Services Council.

Table 3: Qualifications recognised by the Social Services Council for Practitioners and Support Workers (15)

Qualifications previously accepted for Managers or Lead Practitioners and now acceptable for Practitioners	Scottish Vocational Qualification 4 Playwork at Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework Level 9
	Scottish Vocational Qualification 4 Social Services (Children and Young People) at Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework 9
	Scottish Vocational Qualification 4 Children's Care, Learning and Development at Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework Level 9 phased out January 2013
Qualifications accepted for Practitioners	Higher National Certificate in Early Education and Childcare at Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework level 7
	Scottish Vocational Qualification 3 in Playwork at Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework Level 7
	Social Services (Children and Young People) at Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework 7
	Scottish Vocational Qualification 3 In Children's Care learning and Development at Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework 7 being phased out

	Open University Diploma in childhood practice
Qualifications accepted for support workers	National Certificate in Early Education and Childcare at Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework Level 6
	Scottish Vocational Qualification 2 Social Services (Children and Young People) at Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework Level 6
	Scottish Vocational Qualification 2 Playwork at Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework Level 6
	Scottish Vocational Qualification 2 Children's Care, Learning and Development at Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework level 6 being phased out
	Higher National Certificate Additional Support Needs (Supporting the Individual)
	National Progression Award Playwork and Child Care – being phased out
	The Early Years Developing Practice (The Open University module E100) - see Open University Diploma Higher Education Childhood Practice
PDA in Education Support Assistance at Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework Level 6	

Table 4: Other qualifications (9)

Institution	Course	Level(s)
University of Strathclyde	Early Years Pedagogue	Postgraduate Certificate, Diploma and MEd

University of Gloucestershire	Professional Studies in children's play	Masters
Leeds Beckett University	Playwork	BA Honours
Play Scotland	Professional development award in strategic planning for play	Below degree level 8 short course.
The Open University	Supporting teaching and learning in primary schools Supporting teaching and learning	Certificate Diploma
The Robert Gordon University	Social Pedagogy Working with children Working with adults	BA
The University of Strathclyde	Advanced Residential Childcare	MSc

All tables are compiled from information in "Learning about Play" (Audain and Shoolbread, 2015).

Report Introduction and analytic tools

Enquiry Questions

The questions for the enquiry were set in advance from the play strategy implementation group. The introduction to the report explained why there was a problem in only using the definition of play as set out in the Playwork Principles (Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group, 2005) in that sense of using

only “freely-chosen, spontaneous, child-led play” as the analytic tool to define whether “play” is covered in the wide range of qualifications to be reviewed.

Children’s Rights to Play and Education

This problem was addressed by considering children’s rights under the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UN, 1989) and the General Comment on Article 31(UN, 2013) which affirmed the right to play, culture, rest and recreation. Under the UNCRC children also have rights to education; Articles 28 and 29, as well as rights to participation and freedom of expression, Articles 12 and 13. It was concluded that all of those rights should be covered in the assessment, as all relate to children’s development, learning, agency and choice.

Childcare and Learning Services in Scotland

Children’s services in Scotland, providing play, including free and spontaneous play, are usually also concerned with children’s care, development and learning. Children can be engaged in play in either the specific educational sense (Active Learning in early learning and childcare and in Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)) (Scottish Executive, 2004) or in a wider social and cultural sense in out of school care, playgroups, childminding, parent and toddler groups, play in school break time.

It was considered, in the actual context of children’ services and children’s rights, to focus only on the strict Playwork Principles definition of play, as the analytic tool, would potentially miss the other strong dimensions of play and child agency within qualifications.

Literature reviewed in the report

Historical context

A broad ranging literature review, which formed the scope for identifying relevant “play” content, included a sketched historical perspective on early philosophies relating to play e.g.: “Locke (1884), Groos (1898, 1901), Huizinga (1949), Hall, (1904),” (Audain and Shoolbread, 2015, pp 18-19) and

provided critical commentary on evolutionary and recapitulation theory, as being particular to a specific culture and era, and not of real relevance today.

There are many common roots, such as nature, outdoors, freely chosen activities, in some of the concerns of Playwork with child development and early learning pioneers: e.g. “Rousseau, 1762, Froebel, 1826, Dewey, 1897, Steiner (2002/1965), Montessori (Pollard, 1990) the McMillan sisters (Steedman, 2004) and Robert Owen’s ground breaking work in Scotland (Donnachie, 2003)” (Audain and Shoolbread, 2015, pp 18-19).

Play and Playwork theorists

Play theorists relating to Playwork: e.g. “Bonel and Lindon (2009), Hughes (2001, 2006), Brown (2003, 2009) Sturrock and Else (1998) Sutton–Smith (1997), Russell and Lester (2008), Gill (2014) Greave and Cole-Hamilton (2011, 2012) Rogers, Pelletier and Clarke (2009) Else, Sexton and Nutall (2010)” (Audain and Shoolbread, 2015, pp 18-19) and the role of the Playworker were discussed, with further critical analysis of recapitulation theories.

Child Development and Learning theorists

Child development and learning theorists were used to demonstrate that play is an integral part of learning and development, e.g. “Piaget (1955, 1962), Vygotsky (1933/1966, 1978, 1987) Bronfenbrenner (1979) Erikson (1951), *social constructivist factors* e.g. Bandura, Ross and Ross, (1961); Ainsworth and Bell (1970), *deep engagement*, Laevers (1994, 2001) *and scaffolding learning through play*, Bruner and Ross (1976) “ (Audain and Shoolbread, 2015, p 19, *italics definitions added*).

Socio-cultural and creative context

The work of socio-cultural researchers set out the importance of considering the cultural context: “...such as Rogoff (2003), Lave and Wenger (1991), child agency; James and Prout (2004), and the developmental niche, Super and Harkness (1986, 1992)” (Audain and Shoolbread, 2015, p 19).

Malaguzzi, in Edwards, Gandini, & Forman (2008), affirms the hundred languages of children, and the concept of the rich child in terms of their own creative talents, interests and engagement.

Children's agency, rights and participation

Paradigms, based on children's rights, participation and perceptions, their agency and choice: e.g. "Kellett (2005, 2009a & b, 2010), Siraj- Blatchford (2002, 2009) Moss and Petrie (2002)" (Audain and Shoolbread, 2015, p 19) are also considered relevant for the current context for play, including new methodologies in consulting with and acting on children's own views.

Focused section on play and break times in school

The literature review has two focused sections; one on break/ play time in schools, (Blatchford and Baines (2013) breaktime project, which demonstrates the growing trend in the UK and US to cut down on time for children's play and lunch breaks, the constraints of playground space, children's fears of bullying, effects of gender and race divisions, and averse approaches to risk.

The British Library Opie's related research project (2011), however, demonstrates children's own playground culture is alive and well, incorporating television heroes and adapting pop songs into playground lore.

Grounds for Learning reports (Robinson, 2014a, b & c), and Lawton, Audain and Shoolbread (2008) lunchtime research report all demonstrate that the school playground environment for young people is often unattractive, unwelcoming, often with more priority given to car parks, and that young people value break times for social time with their friends, or to leave the school for a proper break. Robinson (2014 c) makes a number of recommendations in improving the playground environment and recognising it as the social space it is for young people.

Focus – case study - Finnish Education and Play

The other focus is a case study of the Finnish Education system (Sahlberg, 2014a, b & c), including play as process, in a small study of primary schools in Finland (Hyvönen, 2011).

The Finnish education system potentially allows for play breaks every hour, and indeed uses playful techniques within classroom practice. Children are in play based early learning to age seven, and their summer breaks are more than two months, yet consistently their PISA scores are high (Sahlberg, 2014a, b & c). Using highly trained Masters Level, well-respected and autonomous teachers also creates positive outcomes, as well as free balanced meals and support where needed for children, according to Sahlberg (2014a).

The play as process study (Hyvönen, 2011) analysed the different play techniques of teachers and play processes children engaged in with their own play and learning. Despite the strong commitment and support for play based learning in all the classes studied, teachers found it hard to analyse or step back to reflect on how play supported their teaching practice. Teachers who carried out reflective practice, identified as *afforders* of play, compared to say, those who were *allowers*, displayed the richest understanding and engagement through play, and children's wellbeing and attainment was positively influenced (Hyvönen, 2011).

Extending thinking about play: supporting learning, wellbeing and education

The focused studies were included to extend thinking about how play can support education, whilst still remaining free play processes for children. They also ensured that the needs of school aged children, including young people, are covered. They demonstrated the value of play in and out of the classroom, in terms of supporting children's wellbeing and learning needs, and the importance of a supportive environment (political, cultural, social, emotional and physical) for play, and the Opie's work demonstrated child agency and resilience through changing circumstances. The literature review therefore underpinned the following evaluative criteria used to analyse the content of qualifications.

Evaluation Criteria for analysis

Main themes for analysis:

- Play Pedagogies/ Playwork Theory and Practice
- Play, Child Development and Learning

Sub themes

- Children's Rights and International modern/postmodern theory
- Play and Learning Environment
- Play and Learning – Creativity, curriculum e.g. Te Whariki (New Zealand curriculum), Active Learning / digital learning

Method:

Research was conducted to supplement information on relevant contacts in terms of providers of qualifications, National Occupational Standards (NOS), and for interviews and online training surveys.

All providers of the main degree-level childhood practice qualifications for the Scottish Social Services Council registered workforce and all teacher training providers in Scotland were contacted, as well as some specialist play degree level courses in the UK.

Childhood Practice Degree courses

Information was obtained for the eight childhood practice related degree courses, which were analysed and set out in the appendix (tables 1.1 – 8.1, Audain and Shoolbread, 2015).

Teacher Education

There was a poor response from the teacher training providers, as many were in the process of updating their courses. This gap was addressed by producing a short online survey, which gained responses from three teacher-training providers, and a focus group was held of teachers and primary school assistants. This was supplemented by research into teacher guidance,

teacher registration standards and content of the Curriculum for Excellence, (CfE) (Scottish Executive, 2004) and early learning and childcare guidance materials in Scotland. This information is compiled and evaluated in the “Play in Education” section in the report.

Scottish Vocational Qualifications for early learning and childcare

For the relevant Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs), Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Professional Development Awards (PDAs) this data was gathered and reviewed via publicly available online sources, such as the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for specific vocational qualifications.

Over 350 individual units within the 15 qualifications relating to the main vocational qualifications accepted on the Scottish Social Services Council register from levels 5 – 9 were analysed using the evaluation criteria. This analysis is set out in summary tables in the report and individual tables in the appendix to the report.

Interviews

A series of nearly 20 interviews (interviews section) were held with key agencies and individuals.

Results:

Research question 1: To what extent is play covered in formal qualifications within education, childcare (and play) settings?

Childhood Practice degree/post degree level results:

The Childhood Practice BA, BA (Hons) MEd, PGDip and PDA level 9 Qualifications are mainly management and leadership qualifications, with such topics covering half their core modules (see appendix: tables 1.1-8.1, Audain and Shoolbread, 2015).

More than half (5) covered Play Pedagogies, Playwork related theories and practice in some detail (appendix table 32, Audain and Shoolbread, 2015), however, most relevant in depth modules were optional.

All covered play in terms of child development and learning, children's rights, the environment, curriculum and some covered creativity.

Post graduate level childhood practice results

Above BA level, opportunities were identified to develop modules covering play in the development and learning and the free play sense, which are applicable to both childhood practice graduates and to teachers looking to work towards master's level. E.g. The University of Strathclyde: Early Years Pedagogue (appendix, table 11, Audain and Shoolbread, 2015) contains at postgraduate level, evidence of the criteria e.g.: play in learning and development, the play environment, children's rights, global and modern theories, children's languages and creativity and curriculum such as Te Whariki (New Zealand).

Pre- degree level childhood practice qualifications results:

Playwork Principles definition of Play

Fourteen of the Scottish Vocational Qualifications or National Certificate/Higher National Certificate, Professional Development Award, or progression awards, of the qualifications assessed, contain play in the fundamental Playwork sense in either core or optional units.

The eight with mandatory core units were:

- The National Progression Award in Playwork and Childcare at level 5 (now phased out)
- The Scottish Vocational qualifications in Playwork at levels 6, 7 and 9,
- National Certificate (level 6) and Higher National Certificate (level 7) in Early Education and Childcare
- Open University Diploma in Higher Education (level 7), including module E100, accepted for support workers.

The Scottish Vocational Qualification Social Services (Children and Young People) at levels 9, 7 and 6, and the Scottish Vocational Qualification Children's Care, Learning and Development at levels 9, 7 and 5, covered play in this sense, but only in optional units.

Play in Child Development and Learning

The three Playwork qualifications above did not cover play in child development and learning, at any level.

For the Scottish Social Services (Children and Young People) three levels; child development and learning, are optional, not core subjects, and this is a change from the predecessor qualifications (being phased out) Children's Care Learning and Development where learning and development were part of core units. However the level 9 Scottish Social Services (Children and Young People) has an underpinning value statement about understanding child development so it is covered in this sense.

The National Certificate (level 6) and Higher National Certificate (level 7) in Early Education and Childcare, in both core and optional modules, while most other qualifications studies covered play in child development and learning, through optional choices.

Children's agency, rights, creativity and environment

All three Social Services Council Children and Young People levels of qualification have value statements about child agency and choice and therefore met agency and rights criteria.

At the lower levels of all qualifications, (levels 5 and 6) children's rights were often about child protection rather than children's participation, but the play or learning environment is covered across all qualifications. Only a few have specialist optional units on creativity, but most, apart from Playwork related qualifications, also have a focus on a range of curriculum related topics.

Play in formal Education curriculum and guidance

Free Play and Active Learning

Free play is included in the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) (Scottish Executive, 2004) and is a strong feature of guidance for the youngest children, including reference to the national play strategy and playwork principles in Building the Ambition (Scottish Government, 2014a) and

guidelines for the curriculum in early learning (Scottish Executive, 2007) also mentions free play and Active Learning.

“Active learning is learning which engages and challenges children’s thinking using real-life and imaginary situations. It takes full advantage of the opportunities for learning presented by:

- spontaneous play
- planned, purposeful play
- investigating and exploring
- events and life experiences
- focused learning and teaching

Supported when necessary through sensitive intervention to support or extend learning” (Scottish Executive, 2007, p. 8).

Outdoor learning guidance also includes Active Learning and child agency and choice (Learning Teaching Scotland, 2010a).

Through teacher registration standards (GTCS, 2012) and links to the UNCRC (UN,1989) and Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC), (Scottish Government, 2008a) , teacher training includes children’s rights and agency, as well as attending to their holistic wellbeing needs, also reflected in the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) overarching indicators (Scottish Executive,2004).

Play in early learning and development

Teacher training providers cover play, early learning and development; one mentioned this comprised around a third of their course, however, one teacher interviewed, who had the one year postgraduate Diploma in Education (2011) said neither play or child development were covered.

The Open University courses for education support assistants (appendix, table 15, Audain and Shoolbread, 2015) are very focused on play in both the playwork principles sense and on active learning, creativity, the environment for play and children’s rights, as well as curriculum and specific topics.

Interviews: Teachers and Assistants on Play and Risk

Teachers and Pupil Support Assistants interviewed in the focus group believed in children having opportunities to play, even take risks, and play in school for this to help make learning fun. They felt that there was not support for this from society, and this was also borne out in early year's curriculum guidance (Scottish Executive, 2007), which noted that it might be hard to convince parents of the value of learning through play in schools, although teachers should try to do so.

Potential professional update courses

The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) also can accredit "professional update" courses, and there is an example given of a recent award developed on the topic of outdoor learning.

Discussion:

Play in Education

Active Learning, Curriculum and Playwork and role of Support staff

Play is expected to be part of the learning practice in Primary 1 and Primary 2, through Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) (Scottish Executive, 2004) and this is perhaps an area where qualifications for Pupil Support Assistants provide a bridge across Active Learning, curriculum and Playwork, especially where options to cover Playwork training are taken up by assistants.

The Playwork unit, supporting Playwork in schools, might be useful here, but again, perhaps this is needed at level 7 as well as level 6. Playwork Scottish Vocational Qualifications could be updated to include more knowledge of the curriculum, Active Learning and child development, which might equip workers with skills to work in both play and school settings.

Professional update course development

A course on play could be developed for teachers, similar to the outdoor learning professional update award accredited by the General Teaching Council (interviews).

The Finnish case study, (Hyvönen, 2011) shows, even in a culture and school system where play is highly valued, using such processes are not always simple to understand, deliver or assess. If there is a play professional update developed, it is better to develop this at a higher academic level, which includes learning how to assess different types of play as processes and in learning and using creative methods (e.g. Reggio Emilia) to measure progress. Some modules from the Professional Development Award Childhood Practice could be relevant and useful (interviews).

Synthesising play, child development and learning

The literature review tried to synthesis play in the Playwork Principles sense with the wider child development and learning canon. It was demonstrated that the processes of play can be utilised for child development and learning outcomes without taking away the intrinsic motivation and freedom of the child's own personally determined play choices.

Children's social relationships

Play as a process and the affordance of play, can be justified within learning frameworks, as well as supporting children's wellbeing and happiness on a day-to-day level. The literature also affirmed the centrality of social relationships to child development and play is very much part of the process of creating social relationships and learning social skills, relevant for their culture and environment.

Potential for development in schools

Through interviews and focus group discussions, the area identified that had strong potential for development is during in the break and play time in schools, as well as in play and childcare, out of school care, breakfast and holiday clubs often co-located in schools. The Finnish case study (Sahlberg, 2014a, b & c) is of particular relevance in terms of the information about how the school day is broken up with frequent breaks for play, rest and restoration.

Play-based learning techniques are used within and outside the classroom, as Hyvönen (2011) demonstrates. Following Teaching Scotland's Future

(Scottish Government, 2011) there are moves to make teaching a Masters level occupation in Scotland, (interviews, play in education section), perhaps combining this development with reassessing the structure of the school day might bring children improved wellbeing and outcomes.

Realising children's rights for play breaks in school

As the break time project website information and articles (Blatchford and Baines, 2013) demonstrated, children and young people's time for breaks in schools are getting shorter in the UK, with less time for play, relaxation or eating lunch. However, the Finnish study (Hyvönen, 2011) suggests, more time for play and/ or short frequent breaks from learning, longer lunch breaks and play based learning can enhance children's educational outcomes as well as their general wellbeing.

Improving the environment for Play and Learning

Extending children and young people's break time should include extending and improving the environment of the playground, as the Grounds for Learning studies demonstrate (Robinson, 2014a, 2014b & 2014c).

This is where, in terms of the holistic environment e.g. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2007), extending the role of Playwork trained staff to support play and leisure activities for children and young people, during breaks is an opportunity. Also creating or preserving longer lunch breaks and perhaps more frequent play breaks throughout the day. Some staff are able to work with many of the same children in the breakfast, out of school and holiday clubs, or indeed the classroom, as a pupil support assistant too.

Such trained staff could work with the children and school management in improving the physical play environment, and they could support and facilitate play using play and active learning methods, which ensure children's autonomy, choice, balanced risk and the joy of play.

Need for longer play breaks for children

What might be quite radical in meeting the needs of children is to have slightly longer or more frequent breaks, inside and outside the classroom, where both

free play, including risky play, and active learning through play processes can enhance, learning, development and educational curriculum outcomes.

It was suggested in interviews, that those schools which have focused on play during playtime and in the playgrounds, and where there is a whole school approach in place tend to find greater success (interviews).

Supporting outcomes

Certainly supporting teachers, creating a whole school approach, and utilising the skills of play trained staff during breaks, in the classroom and in wider play activities for children before and after school contributes towards the outcomes set out in the introduction, from the National Play Strategy Action Plan (Scottish Government, 2013a).

“All children and young people enjoy high quality play opportunities, particularly outdoor free play in stimulating spaces with access to nature, on a daily basis in school, nursery and early learning and childcare. (Scottish Government, 2013a, p.20).

Responsibilities of learners and employers

There are various paths a learner takes in terms of including a great deal, or much less, play or child development and learning focused units or modules at all levels of qualifications. Apart from specialist Playwork qualifications, and a few others, to cover play in the Playwork Principles sense required choosing available optional units or modules.

Given the optional factor of studying play, child development and learning, in many courses, this then relates to the point (interviews) that qualifications should be seen to be not the end but the start of an individual's professional learning journey, which should embrace lifelong learning and Continued Professional Development (CPD). However, the employer must also take responsibility and ensure that employees are provided with the resources and opportunities to allow their employee to meet the gap in their skills or knowledge.

Investment in the workforce

It was recommended, to meet aspirations for the workforce to be more educated in play and to deliver more play based work with children, that this requires investment by government in qualifications and in professional development resources.

Play, safety and risk

For school age children the play breaks and lunchtimes could be extended in terms of time and of content of facilitated risky play, as well as using play processes within classroom practice.

The approach to risky play in early learning and childcare, and out of school care, has developed to recognising positive risk benefits to children of extending their skills, judgement and knowledge of risk taking and those related to keeping children safe.

As the literature (Moss and Petrie, 2002, Gill, 2007) covered, using risk to constrain children's play and freedom is part of wider social attitudes as well as, parental fears and expectations about child safety and their demands for "learning not play" (focus group), (Scottish Executive, 2007). The interviews demonstrated, for childcare providers to extend children's development and enjoyment of risky play through using scooters or skateboards etc., has been difficult in terms of the strict requirements of insurance companies. The health and safety executive is clear that there should be risk in play (HSE, 2012). As Bronfenbrenner & Morris (2007) clearly identify, the environment for play, is highly influenced by wider cultural factors; in this case, insurance companies fear of litigation.

Conclusion and recommendations

In addressing the main question it was found that Play in both the strict Playwork Principles sense and the wider child development and learning sense is covered, to different degrees, in the whole range of main qualifications assessed, but often only as an optional choice.

The individual and their employer must ensure they address gaps in their knowledge about play, child development and learning, as required by registration bodies and the needs of their setting.

There is a rich tradition of learning through play, and spontaneous play, in terms of early learning and childcare guidance in Scotland. There is an opportunity for schools to also become better sites of the complementary support to learning, development and wellbeing of children through the provision of play opportunities and processes in free time and in classroom practice, and in out of school care, before and after school, and in holidays.

Qualifications recommendations:

- Every qualification unit at the Scottish Vocational Qualifications related to Playwork needs to be updated in terms of reference to UNCRC generally and Article 31. When Playwork National occupational standards are updated consideration should be given to including play in terms of learning and development topics to make the qualification more useful to a wider range of staff. Creativity must be a stronger focus.
- Child development and learning, including through play, should be in core, not optional, modules in all courses.
- The Social Services (Children and Young People) qualifications should be clear about “activities” including planned or free play, as defined in some, but not all, relevant modules.
- Creativity and creative play techniques must be embedded across all qualifications.
- For Childhood Practice degree level courses, in terms of the play principles or play and child development, if these topics are not covered
(or insufficient information was provided to judge this) then it is clear from other course providers that modules can and should be developed

Promoting and Extending Play in Schools

- There needs to be more opportunities for teachers to learn and understand techniques to facilitate play based learning in the classroom and to allow for spontaneous play. A Professional update course could be developed.
- The literature review demonstrated that play and breaks actually enhance and support children young people's wellbeing in school, and their readiness to learn, therefore it was recommended schools find ways to incorporate longer, more frequent breaks during the school day and week, or at least preserve what breaks they have now.
- Consider using play trained pupil support assistants across the school, in class, in play and break times and linking with or also working in the before, after school and during holidays, out of school childcare services.
- Play training should include how children learn and develop through play, especially in terms of social relationships and skills, which enhance the ability to engage in learning across subjects.
- Taking risks is also part of learning and development therefore there should be opportunities for risky play supported by a whole school approach, trained staff, and understanding risk benefits, including outdoor activities and trips.

Further Research

- As part of funded doctorates or Masters level courses, there should be a body of new studies into play as a process and how it supports learning and development in schools, out of school care and holiday services.
- Building the Ambition (Scottish Government, 2014) is a useful catalyst for new units, courses or research studies relating to younger children in early learning and childcare.
- This research did not cover the play and leisure needs of young people (youth) except those in the break time and grounds for learning studies; so this is an area for further study.

Wider Recommendations

- Parents should be told more about the benefits of play especially play and breaks beyond the early years, in school and how this helps, not hinders wellbeing and learning. A public awareness campaign for parents was suggested.
- There should be more done on a UK level to change insurance companies' attitudes to risky play.

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