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Investigating Scottish Primary Teachers' Attitudes and Knowledge of Playful Pedagogy

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Rationale and Background

In 2020, lives were flipped upside down by the announcement of the COVID-19 pandemic. This practitioner enquiry centres around the reintroduction of playful pedagogy, following the COVID-19 pandemic. Within Scotland, playful pedagogy is supported by Scotland's current Play Strategy (Scottish Government, 2021), which states that *"play should be recognised as having a pivotal role in supporting children's wellbeing at school as well as facilitating their learning"*. This research investigated primary teachers' attitudes and knowledge of playful pedagogy within Scotland post-pandemic.

Research Questions

What are Scottish primary teachers' attitudes and knowledge of playful pedagogy?

- What are Scottish primary teachers' **understandings** of playful pedagogy?
- How do Scottish primary teachers reflect on ways that they **implement** playful pedagogy?
- What do Scottish primary teachers perceive as the **potential barriers** to embedding playful pedagogy?

Methodology

This practitioner enquiry used a mixed methods approach to explore:

- **teachers' understandings of playful pedagogy**
- **how they implement playful pedagogy**
- **the potential barriers to the successful implementation of play-based learning.**

The sample consisted of **80 Scottish primary teachers** ranging from Nursery to Primary 7 who were employed in **23 of the 32 Scottish local authorities** (71.9% of Scottish LAs). The researcher used an **online questionnaire** to gain an overview of teachers' current attitudes and knowledge of playful pedagogy, then invited a selection of the sample to a **semi-structured interview** via Zoom to gain a deeper understanding.



Teachers' Understandings

The findings suggest that **most participants have a good understanding of playful pedagogy**, with no significant differences in the definitions given by teachers from different stages.

"It's about giving children ownership to take forward their own learning."

"The utilisation of a really strong environment to facilitate play-based experiences gives them the opportunity to apply previously taught skills and to develop their own skills."

Implementation of Play

The findings suggest that **practitioners have a positive attitude towards implementing playful pedagogy**. However, **practitioners in lower primary stages (Nursery and P1) are more likely to implement it**. The way that playful pedagogy is implemented also varies depending on the stage.

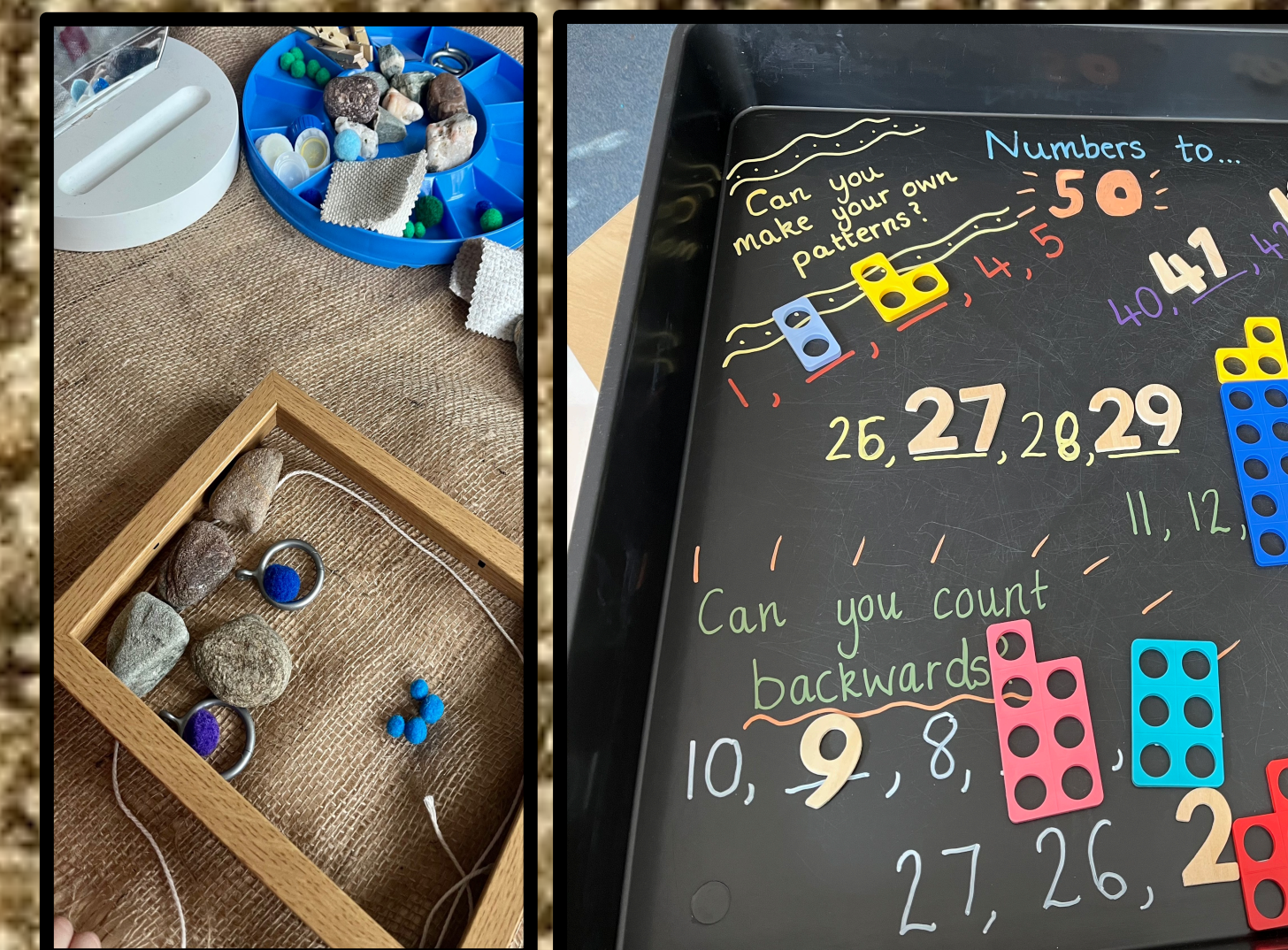
Potential Barriers

The findings suggest that **practitioners from different stages identify similar problems**, such as lack of training and resources. However, teachers from middle and upper stages also have different concerns, e.g. pace and preparing learners for high school.

"So that's a bit frustrating because a lot of the resources you have to buy yourself"

"The curriculum is so cluttered; you've got so much work to get through that you can't do it the justice it deserves."

"I am really, really pro play. Although I do also think that it doesn't prepare you for moving up the school."



Recommendations

For Practitioners

- Practitioners who predominantly work with younger children should prioritise this as an area of professional development.
- Participate in peer observation.
- Conduct more research with participants across Scotland to determine feasible approaches to dissolving the barriers to implementing playful pedagogy.

For School Leadership Teams and Local Authorities

- Create an online network to provide teachers with an opportunity to share practice within different levels.
- Re-examine the training and funding available.

References

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT, 2021. *Progress Review of Scotland's Play Strategy 2021: Play in a COVID-19 context* [online]. Edinburgh: Scottish Government. [viewed 07 March 2022]. Available from: https://www.playscotland.org/resources/print/Play-Scotland-Play-Strategy-Review-Play-in-Covid-2021.pdf?plscctlm_id=20943

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