



University  
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**INVESTIGATING SCOTTISH PRIMARY TEACHERS'  
ATTITUDES AND KNOWLEDGE OF PLAYFUL PEDAGOGY**

**BY**

**Abbey McNeil**

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## ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic drastically changed learning experiences for millions of learners, however, the recent relaxation in COVID-19 mitigations has allowed practitioners to reintroduce playful pedagogy back into their classrooms. This presents an opportunity to investigate Scottish primary teachers' attitudes and knowledge of playful pedagogy post-pandemic. This practitioner enquiry used a mixed methods approach to explore teachers' understandings of playful pedagogy, how they implement it and 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 local authorities). 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 with the researcher via Zoom to gain a deeper understanding. The findings of the study suggest that Scottish primary teachers have a good understanding and intention to implement playful pedagogy. Differences in the extent to which the approach is implemented consistently and in a meaningful fashion were found between lower primary stages and older classes. Practitioners also identified the barriers which prevent implementation. This research provided practitioners with an opportunity to develop their knowledge of playful pedagogy by reflecting on their practice and presents an opportunity for school leadership teams, local authorities, and policymakers to reflect on some of the barriers to ensure all learners can experience play-based learning in Scottish primary schools.

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## **PERMISSION TO CONSULT**

I give permission for this dissertation to be made by the University of Glasgow to anyone who wishes to consult it or knows of its existence.

## ABBREVIATIONS

BERA	British Educational Research Association
CfE	Curriculum for Excellence
CLPL	Career-Long Professional Learning
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GTCS	General Teaching Council for Scotland
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### 1.1 Background

In 2020, individuals around the globe had their lives flipped upside down by the announcement of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Scotland, non-essential workers were sent home, schools were closed and most of the country was asked to stay indoors. Learning was switched to a remote learning model, with a greater reliance put on technology. In 2022, two years after the school closures, education establishments were back to providing learning experiences that would not have been out of place pre-pandemic, including the reintroduction of play-based learning.

Playful pedagogy or ‘learning through play’ as it is often referred to, has strong roots in educational literature, from seminal work by Froebel in the 1800s to more recent developments. Some of the benefits include improved attainment (Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2013), motivation and engagement (Wainwright et al., 2019) and social development (Wood, 2010). There is not one clear definition of playful pedagogy within the literature; however, it is accepted that play is a core aspect of early childhood development (Brooker, Blaise and Edwards, 2014). Within Scotland, there are two key education policy documents: the CfE (Scottish Government, 2008) and Realising the Ambition: Being Me (Scottish Government, 2020). These documents clarify the accepted definition of playful pedagogy within Scotland: *“play pedagogy values children’s contributions to their own learning and offers opportunities for children to take ownership of their learning”* (Moyle, 2015 cited in Scottish Government, 2020, p.47). However, it also presents a tension between this child-centred approach and the barriers that many teachers face. The strength of this statement will be discussed in relation to the literature within Chapter Two.

This project is important to the researcher both personally and professionally, as they taught throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and are currently supporting learners within a primary school. Through professional dialogues with colleagues and their own reflections, they understand some of the challenges that teachers are facing with the reintroduction of playful pedagogy.

## **1.2 Rationale and Research Questions**

The rationale for this practitioner enquiry centres around the reintroduction of playful pedagogy, following the COVID-19 pandemic. This is based on Scotland's current Play Strategy (Scottish Government, 2021a, p.17), 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”*. The researcher is currently based within East Renfrewshire Council and the local authority's response to the Play Strategy promotes a culture where primary school staff are encouraged to develop their understanding of playful pedagogy and collaborate with Early Learning Centres (East Renfrewshire Council, 2021a). The promotion of play is also reflected in the researcher's current establishment's 'School Improvement Plan' (East Renfrewshire Council, 2021b). This information coupled with the literature surrounding this area provides a significant rationale to explain why the researcher has chosen this topic. This study meets the elements of practitioner enquiry outlined by Gilchrist (2018) and will provide the researcher with an opportunity to deepen their understanding of playful pedagogy. The researcher will also share their updated practice with colleagues to support their continued professional development.

This study was designed to answer the following research question and sub-questions:

- What are Scottish primary teachers' attitudes and knowledge of playful pedagogy?
  - a. What are Scottish primary teachers' understandings of playful pedagogy?
  - b. How do Scottish primary teachers reflect on ways that they implement playful pedagogy?
  - c. What do Scottish primary teachers perceive as the potential barriers to embedding playful pedagogy?

## **1.3 Dissertation Outline**

This dissertation will explore playful pedagogy and its implementation within the current Scottish education system, through the lens of investigating primary teachers' understanding and attitudes toward playful pedagogy. This dissertation report will consist of five chapters.

Chapter One is the body of text within this section, the 'Introduction', which provided information to create a backdrop of the current context in which this piece of research is set.

Chapter Two provides a critical review of the literature by exploring recent publications whilst paying homage to seminal texts.

Chapter Three provides information regarding the research design and methodology used.

Chapter Four is the 'Findings' section, which will present the results of the study.

Chapter Five is the final section and discusses the research findings and presents conclusions. It also presents recommendations based on the findings and literature explored in this study.

## Chapter Two: Critical Review of Literature

The purpose of this practitioner enquiry is to explore playful pedagogy and investigate Scottish primary teachers' attitudes towards playful pedagogy to support the researcher's own professional development within this area. Chapter One introduced the topic of playful pedagogy and briefly explained its relevance within the Scottish education system. This chapter provides an in-depth exploration of current and seminal literature, whilst applying a critical lens to identify any gaps and make suggestions as to how this practitioner enquiry can be used to bridge these gaps (Winchester and Salji, 2016).

### 2.1 Search Strategy

The researcher conducted a systematic literature search, which started with a wide-scope lens on playful pedagogy and then focused on teacher understanding, implementation and perceived barriers to playful pedagogy. Various online databases were used to ensure the literature review included high-quality literature, including Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC), Summon and JSTOR. Each term was searched in turn using a Boolean search strategy and Boolean search strings (e.g. “playful pedagogy AND teacher understanding”). Researchers support the use of this search strategy as it allows the researcher to compile relevant evidence (Aliyu, 2017). However, some literature included in this literature review was found through less systematic strategies, such as free text queries and accessing related articles. Spencer and colleagues (2018) ‘Framework for Assessing Research Evidence’ was used to determine the appropriateness of all the literature included in this review.

### 2.2 Introduction to Playful Pedagogy

Playful pedagogy has a host of different definitions, which focus on different aspects of the pedagogy. To understand the ambiguous cloud that surrounds the pedagogy, we must address what is meant by the term ‘play’. Play is defined as “*both objective and subjective, comprising qualities of observable behaviour as well as qualities of felt experience*” (Mardell et al., 2016). Researchers differ on what they consider to be the core features of play (Sutton-Smith, 2001). The diversity is illustrated in the numerous play types that children may experience and choose to participate in. Within the Scottish education system, practitioners are advised to promote the sixteen play types (e.g., role play, social play and dramatic play) that were developed by

Hughes (1996). This model provides practitioners with information to identify and assess the play behaviours that they observe (Scott-McKie and Casey, 2017).

Learning through play is an approach used throughout the world. Its' importance was recently strengthened by its' endorsement by UNICEF (2018), in relation to meeting Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education). Its' application is clearly illustrated in education policies. For example, within Scotland, the CfE has many Experiences and Outcomes which promote learning through play from Early level to First level. However, as learners become older and move further through the curriculum their opportunities to explore and learn through play decrease. The Second and Third level Experiences and Outcomes foreshadow a decrease in the importance of playful pedagogy within the learners' academic futures. It signals the shift as they prepare for the transition to secondary education. There is a gap in the field regarding the impact of playful pedagogy on older learners. Some literature states that there are similar benefits among learners of different ages, such as emotional literacy (Mardell et al., 2016). However, there is still a distinct lack of data on the potential impact on older children (LEGO Foundation, 2017). This highlights a tension between policy documents and research. This is a gap which this practitioner enquiry aims to explore, by investigating the play-based experiences that are provided to children from Nursery to Primary 7. Despite some gaps in the literature, there is a strong presence of playful pedagogy within early years education due to the wealth of psychological, evolutionary, and social theories which highlight the importance of play in early childhood development. This provides a possible explanation for the skewed spread of evidence as children age. The history of playful pedagogy will be explored in the next section.

### **2.3 The History of Playful Pedagogy**

The importance of 'play' on child development is not a new phenomenon - Plato spoke of the importance of leisure and play in Ancient Greece (Hunnicut, 1990) and modern theories of play built on the foundations created by ancient philosophers. There are several key theorists within the field, including Jean Piaget (1896-1980), Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852), Maria Montessori (1870-1952) and Susan Isaacs (1885-1948). All these theorists agree on the importance of play for child development, however, differ on the preferred approach to be taken. There is not one theory or approach which is considered 'correct' or one that is inferior to the rest, therefore a practitioner should aspire to understand

these key approaches to make an informed decision to ensure their practice supports their learners effectively.

### 2.3.1 Piaget

Jean Piaget (1896-1980) was a renowned psychologist in the field of child development. His theory of cognitive development remains highly influential within education, as does his approach to play-based learning. Piaget's cognitive development theory sets out a blueprint for how individuals develop from birth to adulthood (Piaget, 1964). He introduced stages of development, which must be completed sequentially; the sensorimotor stage (from birth to 18 months), the pre-operational stage (from 18 months to early childhood), the concrete operational stage (around 7 years old to the beginning of adolescence) and the formal operational stage (from adolescence to adulthood). In his 1964 article, he states the importance of experiencing stimulating environments and socialising on development. This supports Piaget's view of play. He stated that "*when you teach a child something you take away forever his chance of discovering it for himself*" (Piaget cited in Demetriou, 2018, p.284). This quote strengthens the view that Piaget valued play (especially discovery and sensory-based play) and it formed an important aspect of his cognitive development theory (Nicolopoulou, 1993). This approach values child-led exploration, allowing learners to 'discover' skills and knowledge for themselves with the support of adults who have designed a stimulating learning environment. Three types of play behaviour were born out of this approach: sensorimotor play, symbolic play and play with rules (Garwood, 1982). Similarly, to the stages of cognitive development, these were designed to emerge sequentially. The first stage, 'sensorimotor play', coincides with the sensorimotor cognitive development stage. The focus of this type of play behaviour is repeating an action in which the main objective is enjoyment and not goal-orientated (Garwood, 1982). The next stage is defined by a child's ability to recreate a symbol or an action they have seen within their environment (Bretherton, 1984) – 'symbolic play'. The final and third level of Piagetian play is 'play with rules', which requires "*higher levels of socioability*" (Garwood, 1982, p.4), such as taking turns and compromising. Piaget's three levels of play behaviour were extended and adapted by various researchers. For example, Smilansky (1968) built on Piaget's approach and created her own hierarchical approach which included 'functional play', 'constructive play', 'dramatic play' and 'games with rules'. Both approaches show similarities to Hughes's (1996) play behaviours that are promoted in Scotland's Play Strategy (Scottish Government, 2021b). To conclude, Piaget's theory of cognitive development and his view that play is important in the development of knowledge

and skills (Garwood, 1982) remains relevant and influential within current education establishments.

### **2.3.2 Vygotsky**

Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) was another key play theorist. At the core of Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory is the pivotal role that socialisation and culture plays in child development. This approach bears some similarities to Piaget's theory, including the importance of providing learners with 'hands-on' learning experiences (Esteban-Guitart, 2018). However, Vygotsky disagreed with Piaget's discrete, sequential stages. Instead, he focused on four cognitive functions which develop into higher-order functions through social interactions. The lack of importance that Piaget placed on sociocultural aspects of development created a gap in the field for Vygotsky (Nicolopoulou, 1993). This theory states that it is through social interactions with adults that supports the learners bridge the gaps in their understanding. However, Vygotsky's strong views on the importance of play were limited to dramatic and make-believe play (Bodrova, Germeroth and Leong, 2013). He believed that this type of play promotes independence and higher-order thinking. Dramatic play allows learners to experience real social conflict in an imaginary scenario: "*In play the child is free. But this is an illusory freedom*" (Vygotsky, 2016, p.10). The Vygotskian approach which focuses on the importance of play on social development extended within the field. Elkonin expanded on Vygotsky's work through the introduction of the self-regulation theory (Elkonin, 1978 cited in Elkonin, 2005). His work built on the foundations created by Vygotsky, theorising that individuals can learn how to regulate their emotions and behave in socially acceptable ways because of the defined roles that they experience during dramatic play (Bodrova and Leong, 2006). However, Whitebread and colleagues (2009) highlighted the importance of adults guiding the play environment to promote self-regulation. For example, they identify the criticality of showing emotional warmth and security, ensuring the learners feel in control, stimulating problem-solving and using creative challenges and discussions around their learning. The Vygotskian approach to play highlights the importance of creating stimulating and challenging learning environments which allow learners to explore their culture and social customs/relationships - which in turn supports their social development.

### **2.3.3 Froebel**

Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) is considered one of the first play theorists, whose ideas grew in popularity in Germany and spread across the world (Bryant and Clifford, 1992). Froebel

began working within the field almost a century before Piaget and Vygotsky were born and advocated for learning through play. The main philosophical ideas that are promoted within the Froebelian approach focus on “*the unity of creation, respect for children as individuals and the importance of play in children’s education*” (Manning, 2005, p.372). These ideas are promoted by his view of play as “*the highest expression of human development in childhood for it alone is the free expression of what is in a child’s soul*” (Froebel cited in Scottish Government, 2015). Froebel placed a large emphasis on child-led learning, which was inspired by the work of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827). Pestalozzi was a Swiss educational reformist and the father of modern educational science (Ellerton, Vaiyavutjamai and Clements, 2012), whose holistic approach to education promoted self-learning and free investigation (Hewes, 1992). Froebel incorporated Pestalozzi’s work within his own thinking. For example, based on the Froebelian approach, provocations should be planned by practitioners, but the learners should be given the autonomy to choose how to explore and use the materials. His work is still highly influential within early years settings and many learners within these settings will have access to ‘Froebel’s Gifts’. The distribution of these items and the continuation of spreading Froebel’s work is managed by The Froebel Trust. Before the creation of The Froebel Trust, Froebel coined the term ‘kindergarten’ and opened his first centre in 1837 (Bryant and Clifford, 1992). The aim of the centres was to “*incorporate the concept of structured/guided play as a cornerstone of a young child’s learning*” (Manning, 2005, p.372). ‘Froebel’s Gifts’ were created and used in his kindergarten in the 1840s (Wilson, 1967). The gifts were created to represent three forms: forms of life (i.e., objects found within nature and our environment), forms of beauty (i.e., objects with artistic qualities, such as patterns) and forms of knowledge (i.e., objects with links to the 3D world that can be used to explore STEAM objectives) (Whinnett, 2020). ‘Froebel’s Gifts’ have been adapted to reflect the changing needs of learners nowadays versus the 1800s. For example, block play remains popular in early years settings, however, the size of these blocks has changed. Originally Froebel created small blocks which allowed children to construct on a smaller scale, whereas many settings use large blocks developed by Pratt (1913) (Whinnett, 2020). Thus, showing flexibility in the way this approach was designed to ensure it can be adapted to suit the learner's needs. Towards the end of his life, his theory started spreading across Europe, the USA and Japan (Bryant and Clifford, 1992; Dehli, 1993; Wollons, 1993; Valkanova and Brehony, 2006). Even after his death, Froebel’s thinking remains highly influential within education settings across the world.

### 2.3.4 Montessori

Dr Maria Montessori (1870-1972) was considered one of the most famous women in the world at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Kramer, 2017). Her fame and popularity were partially due to her title as the first female doctor in Italy but more notably as a world-renowned educator. She introduced the world to the Montessori Education approach in 1910, which was a theory based on scientific research (Yonezu, 2018). Montessori believed that “*play is the work of the child*” (Montessori cited in Elkind, 1983, p.5). Learning through play is a large aspect of her education theory and it was initially met with success. This success ensured her popularity with the public and she often frequented the front pages of international newspapers. However, within ten years her popularity among her global audience ceased (Kramer, 2017). The Montessori approach originally focused on the educational development of children aged between three and six years old. Their education was split into four focused areas: practical skills, exploring human senses, language, and maths (Maghfiroh, 2017). However, Montessori expanded the approach to extend the age groups to learners aged up to twelve years old (Lillard, 2013) and included additional curricular areas such as the arts and physical exercise (Maghfiroh, 2017). The meaningful play experiences provided by Montessori-trained teachers aims to support learners to reflect on their environment and cultures within their communities. This shows similarities with Piagetian and Vygotskian thinking regarding the importance of learning through interactions, environment and culture. However, she disagreed with fellow constructivist, Piaget, regarding children’s ability to understand more abstract areas, such as geography (Edwards, 2006). Another key aspect of Montessori Education is providing child-led experiences. This attitude of supporting children to choose how they would like to ‘direct’ their learning, shows some similarities to the views of Froebel. Montessori viewed teachers as leaders and observers of learning (Maghfiroh, 2017). Despite our understanding that Montessori strongly advocated for children to guide their own development, educators and researchers have criticised it for being too structured (Lillard, 2013). For example, teachers are expected to follow a set sequence of lessons at each stage. Learners can choose what activities to participate in, however, it is very structured in terms of the learning experiences available to them. Another critique of this approach is its’ accessibility and application within different education settings. It is an expensive programme that requires a considerable amount of funding to ensure the approach is applied fully and may not be entirely accessible for public-funded education (Lillard, 2013). This may explain why the 1950s resurgence in Montessori schools spread as a private school movement (Loeffler, 1992). Despite its’ mixed reviews within the literature, there is no denying the Montessori approach has made an impact and

continues to influence contemporary play theory and early years' education (Montessori, 1976; Lillard, 2013; Edwards, 2006).

### **2.3.5 Isaacs**

Susan Isaacs (1885-1948) was another important play theorist, who valued play and its impact on the social and emotional development of children. Her background was in psychology, and she used the psychoanalytical approach in her theory of play (Shapira, 2017). Isaacs wrote under a pseudonym and through her writing, she was able to ensure important child development theories were made accessible and easy to be understood by individuals outside of academia (Willan, 2009). The value she placed on ensuring parents and caregivers were included within the development of early years education is shown in her 1929 book 'The Nursery Years', which examines the views of parents and includes advice for parents to support their child's development (Isaacs, 1968). Isaacs built on the foundations that were constructed by Froebel and Montessori to provide further support for child-led and active learning. Her thinking on play focuses on the idea that play allows learners to recognise their achievements, which supports the development of their self-esteem and motivation to learn. This highlights one of the benefits she attributes to meaningful play. Her thinking bears similarities to Vygotsky and Elkonin, as all three theorists consider the role of play in providing children with opportunities to develop their emotional literacy and social skills. Isaacs is considered one of the most influential female psychologists of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, due to her ability to "*integrate the increasing theoretical knowledge of child psychology with practical methodology*" (Smith, 1985, p.17). Also, not to forget her legacy of shining the light on the importance of arming early years practitioners with theory-based information to inform their practice and support their professional development (Murray, 2020).

### **2.3.6 Summary**

This section highlights the long history that play has had within education and child development. Playful pedagogy is sometimes considered a new, modern phenomenon by practitioners who are more familiar with rote learning and teaching discrete subjects (Kidwai, 2020). However, 'The History of Play' has proven its' rich history and the views of key play theorists, who are renowned within the field of education. This section provides a backdrop and foundation, which will allow the researcher to evaluate their effectiveness and how the approaches are applied in practice.

## **2.4 Playful Pedagogy in Practice**

The ambiguous nature of play has been addressed in this literature review, but it is important to note that this vague disposition extends to its implementation. The key play theories show some similarities, however, there is not one clear approach for all practitioners to follow to ensure they deliver successful and meaningful play experiences. There are many ways to implement playful pedagogy and ways of categorising the type of play. For example, a practitioner may focus on providing sensory play for their learners, an approach championed by Montessori (Lillard, 2013), or ensuring their children have access to block play, which was a play type that was at the core of Froebel's approach (Whinnett, 2020), or they may incorporate Goldschmied's heuristic play which uses everyday objects to support learners to develop their sensory and motor skills (Bilewicz-Kuźnia, 2017). On the other hand, they may decide to provide a mixture of experiences which use different approaches. Whilst this might be confusing for practitioners it allows them to tailor the experiences for their learners. One area of play that all practitioners must consider when planning their learning space and activities is how they will use the adults to facilitate play. Montessori viewed teachers as leaders and observers of learning (Maghfiroh, 2017), which requires them to take a step back. There is a general consensus within the literature, that adults should learn from children and participate in play – however, not be 'too involved' (Broadhead and Burt, 2012). The differentiation between levels of adult involvement allows practitioners to find a balance between being an active participant and dictating the flow of play. The levels of adult involvement can be split into three categories: child-led play, adult-led play, and adult-initiated play. These categories are accepted within the literature and provide a vehicle to explore the implementation of play. Each of these groups will be explored within this section – with reference to what it may look like in practice.

### **2.4.1 Child-Led Play**

Child-led play is defined as “*a creative approach to learning that allows for spontaneous adventures in play through child-led projects [which] can lead to rich learning experiences that build on children's own interests*” (Woods, 2017, p.i). The focus of this approach is on supporting learners to lead their own learning and development. Practitioners can use a combination of play types and provisions but at the core, the children must be given the freedom to choose what to play with, when to play and how they use the materials. Fisher (2013) describes this as ‘spontaneous learning’. As soon as an adult determines the process or outcome, the activity becomes adult-led or adult-initiated. For example, the practitioner might

lead a maths game introducing the learners to symmetry (adult-led activity), then set them off on an adult-initiated task where they can explore their knowledge of symmetry using the materials the adult has selected for them. The child-led activity could be a couple of days later when the learner decides to explore the block play area and create symmetrical patterns using blocks. The adult is then able to observe the child and assess their next steps. But again, it can only be child-led if the learner is free to choose without adult instruction. This scenario highlights one of the benefits of this type of play, that it promotes independence and creativity (Craft, McConnon and Paige-Smith, 2012). Learners can illustrate their knowledge and skills in different ways – methods that will be developmentally appropriate to each individual. However, this requires practitioners to have clear observation time to assess each learner and log it systematically. Another potential benefit to providing child-led play is allowing learners to explore their sense of self and their emotions (Wood, 2014). As previously stated, Vygotsky believed that dramatic play promoted social development (Bodrova, Germeroth and Leong, 2013). Hence, illustrates how Vygotskian thinking may be applied within education settings by open-ended, child-led imaginary play. However, there are limitations and potential problems with this type of activity. Neaum's (2020) study highlighted that the researchers observed limited engagement in the provisions, despite the activities being viewed as 'inviting' by the adults. Thus, suggesting a tension between what practitioners and children view as appealing. Within play theories, there is considerable mention of the importance of play on social development. However, individuals develop socially at different rates. Vygotsky (2016) claimed that play provides an opportunity for young children to experience social conflict in a safe environment. Adults should only become involved with child-led play when they are required to manage behaviour and support learners who may need additional assistance. This, therefore, limits the children's autonomy. Within Montessori education, teachers accompany learners who exhibit challenging behaviour in their play until they can participate safely without the support of an adult (Lillard, 2013). The literature within the field provides support for implementing child-led activities, whilst also providing support for the most popular view amongst play researchers, that learners benefit from adult intervention and practitioners should use a combination of the three approaches.

#### **2.4.2 Adult-Led Play**

In stark contrast to child-led play, adult-led play is on the opposite end of the spectrum. This type of activity requires constant adult involvement. The practitioner chooses the activity and sets expectations of how the learners should react to the task (Fisher, 2013). This is a technique

that spans the history of modern education. An example of an adult-led activity is an adult reading a book to a group of children. Guimarães and McSherry's (2010) study found that this was the most popular adult-led task used by early years providers. Learners are active participants in the reading-aloud activity as they can create questions, exchange ideas and participate in discussions about the book. Adults sharing stories with children is considered a cornerstone of literacy education (Greene Brabham and Lynch-Brown, 2002) and the involvement of trained educators allow practitioners to carefully scaffold and model this activity to support the learners' development (Morrow, O'Connor and Smith, 1990). Piaget's third level of play focused on activities with explicit rules (Garwood, 1982; DeVries, 2015). 'Play with Rules' requires adult participation when introducing the game with the children, which would be considered adult-led, however when the learners are confident in the rules, they should be able to play with little to no support creating opportunities for child-led and adult-initiated play. This type of play is most in sync with the demands of the curriculum as 'intentional learning' (Fisher, 2013) can take place. It puts educators in a position where they can closely observe the learners and plan for next steps, model key skills and behaviours (Fisher, 2013; Anning, 2015) and work with learners who benefit from additional support in play scenarios (Lillard, 2013). This approach diminishes learners' opportunity to direct their learning, however, it is considered vital for teaching to allow meaningful, independent play to occur down the line. Again, providing further support for using a combination of child-led and adult-led approaches.

### **2.4.3 Adult-Initiated Play**

Adult-initiated play, or adult-directed play as it is sometimes described, is considered the mid-way point. The play is a careful balance between adults framing the learning and children choosing how to explore the resources provided (Craft, McConnon and Paige-Smith, 2012). Adult-initiated play is concerned with the 'potential learning' experience, which requires practitioners to plan "*sufficiently open-ended [activities] for children to work on independently until the adult is ready to react*" (Fisher, 2013, p.83). This approach provides learners with a greater degree of freedom over their learning, whilst allowing adults to scaffold their learning more than is possible during child-led play. However, a potential problem with adults' involvement in play was highlighted by Ólafsdóttir and colleagues (2017). Their research illustrated that when adults create the rules and parameters for play, they have an impact on children's participation, which could potentially exclude some individuals. Children learn

about social interactions and culture through play; therefore, adults must reflect on their own practice to reduce the impact of their biases flooding into play.

#### **2.4.4 Summary**

To conclude, it is clear within the literature that practitioners should aim to use a mixture of child-led, adult-led, and adult-initiated play (Fisher, 2013). However, the literature also notes some limitations to using the approaches, including the pressures put on educators that may lead to practitioners wanting a greater degree of control to ensure the learners are experiencing the full scope of the curriculum (Rogers and Lapping, 2012). Thus, leading to more structured play through the adult-initiated and adult-led approaches. This is one of many potential barriers to the implementation of playful pedagogy – however, this will be explored in more depth in the next section. Despite the limitations, this section has provided a clear overview of the various roles that adults should undertake when implementing playful pedagogy – whilst also providing a critical analysis of current literature within the field and exploring what playful pedagogy looks like in practice.

### **2.5 Potential Barriers to the Implementation of Playful Pedagogy**

This literature review has highlighted the long history of play and its' place within developmental psychology. For example, Froebel and Pestalozzi were prominent educational reformists who highlighted the potential application of play within learning during the late 1700s and early 1800s. Despite this rich history, the application of playful pedagogy is still concentrated in early years settings and the experiences that children receive can be varied (Play Scotland, 2020a). The added complication of the COVID-19 pandemic provides a catalyst to investigate the current map of playful pedagogy within Scotland. The researcher has identified three themes within the literature, which illustrate some potential barriers to embedding playful pedagogy within primary settings: tensions between playful pedagogy and current expectations in Scottish schools, teacher training experiences and parental support. These will be explored with reference to relevant theories and research evidence.

#### **2.5.1 Tensions Between Playful Pedagogy and the Expectations in Scottish Schools**

Scotland has a long, proud history of providing education for children from as early as the 17th Century (Houston, 1982). This long history may explain why education is considered one of the greatest influences on culture within Scotland (Humes and Bryce, 2018). This distinctive

Scottish culture is cultivated and explored through Scotland's CfE (Scottish Government, 2008):

*“The Curriculum for Excellence aims to promote a holistic understanding of what it means to be a young Scot growing up in today's world and to optimise the contribution of education to the wider vitality of Scotland's economy, society and culture.”* (OECD, 2015, p.38)

This curriculum contains Experiences and Outcomes, and benchmarks that learners in Scotland will explore. Furthermore, practitioners apply this information from the CfE and their pedagogical knowledge to create their own classroom curriculum for their learners. This provides teachers with autonomy (Priestley and Minty, 2013; Hedge and MacKenzie, 2016) to provide a holistic education that has each learner at the centre and in theory supports the implementation of play theories. However, it also brings more variation in the experiences provided in schools throughout Scotland. Thus, highlighting a gap as it is unknown what play approaches are being used within Scotland. Child-led learning supports the use of responsive teaching pedagogy. Some schools have pre-determined Experiences and Outcomes for each year group, that practitioners are expected to cover each term or across the course of the year (Hamilton and Wood, 2020). Schools which utilise this planning approach can still allow pupil voice to be heard through the planning, however, it does make it more difficult for learners to lead their own learning. Therefore, limiting the scope of the implementation of the child-led learning approach. Despite the potential to move to a fully pupil-led pedagogical approach to education in Scotland, policies such as the National Improvement Framework (Scottish Government, 2021b) continue to employ traditional summative assessment programmes, such as the Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSA) for school-aged children as young as Primary One. This type of assessment approach provides a direct conflict with the rationale behind the CfE and playful pedagogy. Similar tensions were highlighted by researcher Hyvonen (2011). This is shown in a quote from one of the study's participants who is a teacher: *“I know that there should be playing at school, but I'm worried whether playing can meet the goals of the curriculum”* (p.57). Hyvonen also highlighted teachers feel pressure when implementing playful pedagogy due to concerns regarding the pace of learning. This is despite research which suggests that trained playful pedagogy practitioners feel that learning through play increases engagement and pace (Martlew, Stephen and Ellis, 2011). The literature provides a background to suggest potential contradictions between the approaches highlighted

in Scottish education policy documents and implementing playful pedagogy within primary education settings.

### **2.5.2 Teacher Training Experiences**

Lord and McFarland (2010) recognised the challenges associated with implementing playful pedagogy for Australian practitioners. One factor proposed by the researchers was a lack of knowledge of child development theories and inadequate teacher education training. This view is echoed by other researchers. Researchers such as Gray and Ryan (2016) indicated that practitioners felt that there is a distinct lack of training in playful pedagogy, which can be a potential barrier to successful implementation. Previous research has made recommendations to higher education providers to incorporate it into core learning opportunities for student primary teachers (Hyvonen, 2011). Whereas, Diaz-Varela and Wright (2020) went further, stating that professional development experiences should also be extended to secondary practitioners to allow “*adults the opportunity to revitalize their playful selves and engage in playful opportunities*” (p.135). However, the focus of this study is the views of primary teachers and how they implement playful pedagogy within primary school settings – not within secondary classrooms. Secondary education adopts different pedagogy due to the different ages of the pupils, format of the school day and curriculum. However, Diaz-Varela and Wright’s research, alongside the other research within the field, does provide a relatively strong argument about some inadequacies in the current training experiences provided. Thus, suggesting that this could be a potential barrier to the implementation of playful pedagogy. In contrast to the information presented in this paragraph by other researchers, Martlew and colleagues (2011) highlight the views of experienced teachers who would not directly benefit from an overhaul in the ITE programmes. Instead, they require quality Career-Long Professional Learning (CLPL). Scottish teachers are required to engage in reflective practices and participate in CLPL experiences that are relevant to their practice as part of the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) registration (General Teaching Council for Scotland, 2021). This culture of consistent participation in professional development, suggests that the problem may not be in the willingness of teachers to learn about playful pedagogy but in the availability of high-quality experiences. Another potential problem is the large differences between early years settings (which the majority of the literature focuses on) and primary settings. For example, child to adult ratios differ in Scottish early years centres and primary schools. In nurseries, there is a 1:8 adult-to-child ratio (Care Inspectorate, 2018), whereas the average primary classroom had a pupil-teacher ratio of 15.1 in 2021 (Scottish Government,

2021c). Playful pedagogy is a cornerstone of early years education, therefore trying to apply and mobilise this approach within a primary classroom with limited staff support can present practical challenges. The literature poses many questions and concerns regarding potential barriers to embedding playful pedagogy: including inadequate training experiences. Researchers make recommendations for adapting ITE programmes and CLPL experiences to ensure they are relevant for practitioners in various primary stages.

### **2.5.3 Parental Support**

A common challenge that teachers have claimed to experience is creating and maintaining successful parent-teacher relationships (Lord and McFarland, 2010) when introducing playful pedagogy. The average age of parents of primary aged children in Scotland is mid-thirties to early forties (National Records of Scotland, 2019). Bowdon (2015) claims that many parents prefer their children to receive a school experience that is like the one they received. Their support of “*procedural over playful learning*” is influenced by their own education experiences instead of the large body of literature which states the importance of play in child development. Based on the application of Bowdon’s theory on current parents, education looked very different in the 1980s and 1990s. For example, the early years education provision in Scotland was greatly reduced in comparison to what is currently provided. Only around 50% of 3- to 4-year-olds in urban areas in Scotland had access to early years education before starting school (Watt, 1997) and primary education during this time utilised the 5-14 Programme, which stressed the importance of learners experiencing the full breadth of the initially 5 subject curricula (Clark, 1997). There was also a large importance placed on national testing. However, this period also led to increased understanding of transitions into primary school, which marked the beginning of primary teachers linking up with early years practitioners. The stark contrast in pedagogy used in the 1980s-1990s in comparison to now can potentially explain parents’ negative attitudes towards play. Parents may not value playful pedagogy as an important pedagogical approach to support their child’s development (O’Sullivan and Ring, 2018) due to their familiarity with traditional approaches (Fung and Cheng, 2012). There is a large body of literature which discusses parental support as a potential barrier to implementing successful playful pedagogy. However, there is limited information on the importance of this barrier within Scottish education.

#### **2.5.4 Summary**

The literature highlights several factors which can potentially prevent practitioners from implementing playful pedagogy. The researcher identified three prominent factors within the literature, which include tensions between playful pedagogy and the current expectations in Scottish schools, teacher training experiences and parental support. There is a limited evidence-base for the strength of these barriers within a modern, Scottish context. This presents a gap in the literature, which this research will aim to explore through the views of primary teachers.

#### **2.6 Conclusion**

To conclude this section has highlighted the long history play pedagogy has had within education and child development. Despite its prominence within the literature, an air of ambiguity surrounds the pedagogy. Practitioners can use a combination of approaches to tailor the experiences to meet the needs of each individual learner. However, it requires the practitioner to have a sound knowledge and understanding of the play theories and approaches. Previous research has identified potential barriers to the implementation of play (including lack of training); however, a gap exists regarding what this currently looks like within Scotland post-pandemic. The critical literature review clearly demonstrates the importance of playful pedagogy within education theories but also presents a rationale for the research questions that will be explored in this study.

## Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology

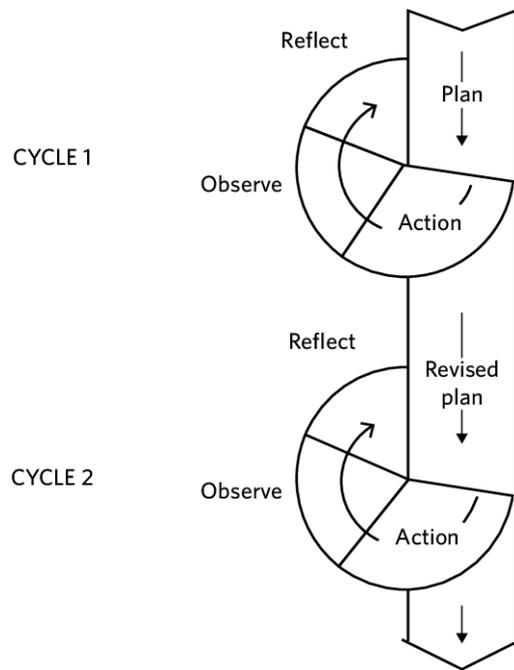
This chapter will explore the hypothesis, design and methodology used in this practitioner enquiry. The relevance and effectiveness of the research methods employed will be discussed, with reference to research literature.

### 3.1 Practitioner Enquiry

Research literature suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a detrimental impact on learner's attainment and altered the teaching approaches employed by practitioners during and after the pandemic. The researcher explored playful pedagogy by collecting primary teachers' responses regarding their understanding of the pedagogy, how they implement playful pedagogy and any factors which they consider a barrier. However, this is a practitioner enquiry, and the overarching research topic was chosen to meet the researcher's development needs and support the learners they work with.

Practitioner enquiry is a piece of research conducted by a teaching practitioner to reflect on and improve their practice. It is an important aspect of modern teaching within Scotland. Its importance is reflected in its inclusion in the Professional Standards for Teaching (GTCS, 2021). The GTCS claim that conducting an enquiry "*empowers teachers, and other education professionals, it can achieve considerable and far-reaching impact and can be 'practice-changing'*" (n.d.). Several terms are used within the literature to describe this type of research (Baumfield, Hall and Wall, 2013), but for the purposes of this study, it will be referred to as a 'practitioner enquiry' as this is a common term used within Scottish literature and by the GTCS.

Kemmis and McTaggart's (2000 cited in Burns, 2015) model utilises a spiral self-reflection to plan inquiry-based research. The four stages of this spiral model begin with identifying a problem, executing a plan, observing the implementation then finally reflecting. Then cycle two begins, where the process repeats itself, becoming more refined each time. There are several significant models that can be used, although the unique nature of this model is that it provides researchers with freedom and flexibility to adapt their research (Koshy, 2010).



*Figure 1: Kemmis and McTaggart's (2000) Action Research Model (cited in Burns, 2015)*

The researcher chose to complete a practitioner enquiry surrounding playful pedagogy as this was an area of their practice they were developing. Their personal reflections and discussions with colleagues highlighted the discomfort that some teachers experienced when implementing playful pedagogy following the pandemic. The benefits and theories of playful pedagogy were accepted by colleagues, however, there was something missing that acted as a barrier. The researcher reflected on the literature and their discussions with colleagues to formulate their research questions:

- What are Scottish primary teachers' attitudes and knowledge of playful pedagogy?
  - a. What are Scottish primary teachers' understandings of playful pedagogy?
  - b. How do Scottish primary teachers reflect on ways that they implement playful pedagogy?
  - c. What do Scottish primary teachers perceive as the potential barriers to embedding playful pedagogy?

### **3.2 Hypothesis**

Based on the literature and professional dialogues between the researcher and teaching colleagues, three hypotheses were created:

- Teachers who predominantly work within lower primary stages (Nursery to P1) will have a greater understanding of playful pedagogy in comparison to teachers who work in middle (P2 to P4) and upper (P5 to P7) primary stages.
- Teachers who predominantly work within lower primary stages (Nursery to P1) will implement playful pedagogy more often in comparison to teachers who work in middle (P2 to P4) and upper (P5 to P7) primary stages.
- Teachers from all stages will determine similar barriers to implementing playful pedagogy.

### **3.3 Research Design**

This study used a mixed-methods research design. A mixed-methods approach is often considered the “third paradigm” of research (Denscombe, 2008; Gunasekare, 2015) and is popular within the field of education research (Johnson and Turner, 2003). This approach provides researchers with an alternative paradigm, which utilises both quantitative and qualitative data. In this study, both quantitative and qualitative data was collected via an online questionnaire and an online, semi-structured interview. The research used the complementarity approach to mixed-methods. The rationale behind using this design was to understand Scottish primary teachers' understandings and attitudes towards playful pedagogy by collecting separate but similar information (Carroll and Rothe, 2010), which allowed for further elaboration and deepened clarification (Greene, Caracelli and Graham, 1989; Gunasekare, 2015). The research design relied on the use of digital technology to allow data to be collected from participants across Scotland in a timely and cost-effective manner (Lefever, Dal and Matthíasdóttir, 2007). Using an online, remote model also comes with some limitations, such as lower data reliability caused by poorer concentration levels (Lefever, Dal and Matthíasdóttir, 2007) or implications for maintaining adequate privacy and security of the online data (Evans and Mathur, 2018). Potential weaknesses of using this approach will be discussed further during the ‘Limitations’ section at the end of this chapter.

### **3.4 Participants**

The sample consisted of 80 individuals, who were qualified primary teachers working within a Scottish primary school. The mean age range was 25 to 34 years old (41.3%: ages ranged

from 20 to 24 years old to 55 to 64 years old) and the gender was split accordingly: 4 individuals identified as male (5%) and 76 individuals identified as female (95%). Individuals who taught learners from Nursery to Primary 7 were invited to participate to provide new information for the field. 28 participants worked predominantly with lower primary stages (Early level: Nursery to Primary 1) (35%), 23 participants worked predominantly with middle primary stages (First level: Primary 2 to Primary 4) (28.7%) and 29 participants worked predominantly with upper primary stages (Second Level: Primary 5 to Primary 7) (36.3%). Chapter Two discussed the importance of playful pedagogy within early years education and its absence within the literature as learners move towards secondary school. Primary teachers in Scotland are expected to be able to teach at any stage and do not require additional qualifications to teach a particular age group. Therefore, it can be argued that teachers of all stages should have a similar understanding of playful pedagogy. The responses were collected from 23 out of a possible 32 Scottish local authorities (71.9%). All public-funded schools in Scotland use the same curriculum (CfE), however, each authority has different priorities and methods for implementing the curriculum. For example, the skills planners that dictate how the CfE is applied differs amongst councils. Investigating the experiences of teachers from different areas in Scotland provided an insight into the views of teachers across the country. All the participants were invited to participate in a follow-up semi-structured online interview. The volunteers were put into three groups based on the primary stages they predominantly worked with, and then two participants from each group were chosen at random. Six individuals participated in the interview measure: all the participants identified as female (100%). Two participants worked predominantly with lower primary stages (Nursery to Primary 1), two participants worked predominantly with middle primary stages (Primary 2 to Primary 4) and two participants worked predominantly with upper primary stages (Primary 5 to Primary 7). Two practitioners from each category of primary stages were invited to participate in the interview to ensure that a spread of responses was collected. This echoes the researcher's argument about the importance of collecting the views of primary teachers from various stages.

### **3.5 Data Collection**

There were two data collection measures: an online questionnaire and an online interview. This provided a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data. Opportunity sampling was used to recruit participants via the researcher's school establishment and a large Scottish primary teacher network that was hosted on Facebook. All ethical documents (i.e. the Plain Language

Statement, Privacy Notice and Consent Form) were hosted on the Microsoft Form at the beginning of the questionnaire and were read by participants before the data collection began.

### **3.5.1 Online Questionnaire**

The online questionnaire was accessed via Microsoft Forms and the data was collected via multiple choice, text entry and Likert matrix table responses. Data was collected about gender, age, the participant's teaching experiences (i.e., the stage/stages they predominantly worked with, the local authority they worked for, whether they worked in a rural or urban area and years of experience), their understanding of playful pedagogy, their implementation of playful pedagogy and the potential barriers to implementation.

Teachers' understandings of play were explored by gathering the participants' responses via an adaption of Palaiologou's (2016) scale. The original scale investigated teachers' perspectives of play-based pedagogy *and* digital devices - the researcher adapted the scale to omit 7 items which measured the views of using digital technology as it was not relevant to this study. The participants of this study were invited to answer the 6-item, 5-point Likert scale. The response options ranged from 1 ("Strongly agree") to 5 ("Strongly disagree"). Potential response scores could range from 6 to 30, with a higher score indicating that the participant strongly agreed with the narrative found in the research literature and had a very good understanding of playful pedagogy.

The implementation of playful pedagogy was explored via an adaptation of Yin, Lee and Jin's (2011) Behavioural Intention Scale. Yin, Keung and Tam (2022) adapted the 2011 scale to ensure the items were relevant to reflect teachers' intentions to implement playful pedagogy within their practice. The Yin, Keung and Tam (2022) adaptation was used in this study. It is a 4-item, 5-point Likert scale, with the same response options as used in the perceptions of play scale. Yin and colleagues (2022) claimed that this was a reliable measure, with a Cronbach alpha value of 0.94. Response scores could range from 4 to 20, with a lower response score suggesting that the participant was less likely to implement playful pedagogy in comparison to those with a higher score.

An adaption of Gray and Ryan's (2016) scale was used to explore the participants' responses to potential barriers when implementing play-based learning. The 7-item, 5-response option Likert scale was used. Some examples of items included "training and awareness", "class

sizes” and “pupil-to-teacher ratio”. Gray and Ryan’s (2016) scale was adapted to remove potentially leading words, such as “lack of training and awareness” which was replaced with “training and awareness”. Participants in online questionnaires do not have the benefit of clarifying the meaning of phrases due to the data collection being completed remotely, therefore it is crucial to thoroughly analyse the wording used to ensure it is not leading or potentially ambiguous (Fox, Murray and Warm, 2003). The 5-response options were the same as the previous two scales. Response scores could range from 7 to 35, with a higher response score indicating that the participant perceived the item as a larger barrier to implementing play, in comparison to a lower score.

### **3.5.2 Online Interviews**

A small selection of participants from the questionnaire measure were invited to an interview with the researcher. Six participants completed the semi-structured interview which took place via Zoom. An online model was chosen as it did not reduce the potential participant pool and allowed the researcher to invite participants from different locations. The interview took approximately fifteen to twenty minutes and consisted of three sections: the opening, the body and the closing. The opening section allowed the researcher to establish rapport and discuss ethics, the purpose of the research, the motivation behind the research topic and a timeline/structure of the interview. The body of the interview explored the participants' teaching background, understandings of playful pedagogy, how they implemented play and what they perceived to be the potential barriers to implementing play. The closing section provided the researcher with an opportunity to maintain rapport and end the interview.

A semi-structured, qualitative interview was chosen as it was an interview approach that allowed the researcher to build rapport with the participants, using the pre-determined questions to *guide* the discussion (de Marrais, 2004). The researcher used Kallio and colleagues (2016) 5-step model to create an interview guide to enhance its credibility. For example, during stage four the researcher pilot tested the interview with a colleague (a Scottish primary teacher), which led to further refinement of the wording and the sequence of the questions. The questions showed similarities between those asked in the questionnaire, which allowed participants the opportunity to expand on the answers given in the previous measure.

### **3.6 Validity and Reliability**

Positionality allows researchers to consider how they as an individual could bias the results of their study (Holmes, 2020). Researchers should examine “*their views, values and beliefs about the research design, conduct, and output(s)*” (Holmes, 2020, p.2). This study was completed by the researcher as a fulfilment of the MEd Professional Practice at the University of Glasgow. Also, the study was a professional enquiry, whereby the researcher was examining an area which they have some experience with, the participants might be colleagues and the researcher had a vested interest to portray the Scottish teaching community in a positive light. The researcher’s own personal attitudes towards play could potentially influence the results if the appropriate measures, design and procedures were not in place. To counteract this, the researcher began the research process by acknowledging their close proximity to playful pedagogy and created a research design which included gaining the responses of a significant number of Scottish primary teachers. The researcher could have used alternative data collection methods such as using a single case study analysis. It may have revealed empirical evidence about a “*phenomenon within its real-life context*” (Yin, 1992, p.23), however, this would prevent reliable generalisations to be made due to the small participant pool (Kennedy, 1979). The researcher aimed for the results to be used to provide a snapshot of attitudes and understandings of playful pedagogy amongst Scottish primary teachers in 2022. Therefore, it was paramount that reliable and valid measures were used to ensure generalisability to the Scottish teaching population. The scales used were all considered statistically valid and reliable; however, they were adapted (e.g. editing of the wording) to ensure all the data collected was relevant and could be used to answer the research questions. The interview questions were created by the researcher. To protect the data, the researcher used Kallio and colleagues (2016) 5-step model to create an interview guide and pilot-tested the interview with a Scottish primary teacher. Therefore, it has been demonstrated that the researcher had considerable proximity to the research area; however, they took additional measures to minimise potential biases.

### **3.7 Data Analysis**

After the data collection was complete, the researcher embarked on the data analysis component of the research. This section will explore how the data was analysed.

### **3.7.1 Quantitative Data**

Quantitative data is associated with hypothesis testing and is used by researchers to provide a subjective answer to a research question (Connolly, 2007). All the quantitative data from this study was collected via an online questionnaire. The researcher transformed the data and entered it into 'IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Statistics' version 28.0. This programme allowed appropriate descriptive and inferential analysis to occur. The quantitative questionnaire scales collected ordinal data. Ordinal data can be ranked in a meaningful way (Connolly, 2007); however, we cannot quantify the difference between each response item. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to use parametric analysis (e.g. using an ANOVA) (Shah and Madden, 2003). A non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis H test was used to compare the differences between teachers from lower, middle and upper primary stages and their responses to each of the scales. The non-parametric testing also assessed the statistical significance of the data.

### **3.7.2 Qualitative Data**

Qualitative data was collected via text entry responses on the online questionnaire and the participants' responses from the online semi-structured interview. The researcher conducted the audio-recorded interview, and then immediately transcribed it. The researcher noted down key phrases and non-verbal communication during the interview which were then added to the final transcript. The interview transcripts and questionnaire responses were then analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach. This approach allowed the researcher to generate codes and themes across the data (Clarke and Braun, 2017). There are various alternative thematic analysis approaches, however, Braun and Clarke's approach was chosen as it provides a greater degree of flexibility to use data from different sources and it is a renowned method within the field (Maguire and Delabunt, 2017).

## **3.8 Ethical Considerations**

Ethics is pertinent to education research and to the teaching profession. The GTCS have clear ethical guidelines that all practitioners must follow. The Code of Professionalism and Conduct (GTCS, 2012) outlines the core principles that all registered teachers must uphold to protect children and young people, and the integrity of the teaching profession. Some examples of the ethical considerations that this researcher explored included data storage, debriefing and

informed consent. However, research is not a perfect process, and some issues arose regarding anonymity, data storage and positionality.

Ensuring anonymity for participants is considered an ethical norm within research (Walford, 2005). Confidentiality and anonymity are intertwined (Wiles et al., 2008) and provide participants with a degree of protection (Moosa, 2013). Anonymity was ensured and relatively straightforward in the online questionnaire measure, as identifiable information (i.e. email addresses) was only collected for participants who volunteered for the interview. The researcher transformed the data to create a secure record of possible interview participants with the individual's email addresses and the primary stage they predominantly worked with. This information allowed the researcher to create three groups (i.e. lower, middle and upper primary stages), then randomly selected two participants per group and contacted them via email to organise an online interview. The volunteers who were not selected were emailed to be informed that they were not selected for the interview, and then their details were destroyed. Complete anonymity was not possible in the interview measure. However, the data was anonymised by replacing identifiable information with a code. This information was communicated to participants in the relevant ethical documents.

All the information was collected remotely and online, via Microsoft Forms or Zoom. This created a potential issue regarding data storage. The researcher was working remotely from home; therefore, they had to take additional precautions to secure the data. The data was stored on the researcher's password-protected personal laptop with antivirus software, which was kept at their private address and all files were password-protected. The participants were made aware of how their data was stored and it followed the GDPR guidelines. The data will be destroyed at the end of the research project.

Positionality and the researcher's proximity to the research were previously explored in the 'Reliability and Validity' section of this chapter. However, it remains an important ethical consideration and one which was explored from the initial stages of the project until the end.

The research received ethical approval from the University of Glasgow's Ethics Committee and was conducted adhering to the BERA (2018) ethical guidelines. The ethical documents can be found in the appendix.

### **3.9 Limitations**

This pragmatic approach used quantitative and qualitative data to explore multiple viewpoints, which generated a lot of different types of data. The researcher suppressed this potential limitation by managing the data appropriately and creating plans for how the data would be organised and stored before data collection began. This prevented any problems that can sometimes arise when using a mixed-methods approach. Therefore, highlighting the researcher's effective conduct and management of the project.

Another potential limitation of this study that was addressed at this stage was the use of online measures. The researcher assumed that the participants were comfortable using the digital technology required to participate in this study. Therefore, this might have prevented individuals from participating due to a lack of equipment or knowledge. However, the researcher chose to use digital platforms that were commonly used by teachers, such as Microsoft Forms, to diminish this. Before the online interview, participants were also sent information to support them when using the Zoom programme and the researcher supported them during the interview when required. Overall, the positives of using digital measures (such as gaining a greater outreach and being cost and time-effective) outweighed the weaknesses – however, the researcher acknowledged and planned for them to limit the impact.

### **3.10 Summary**

To summarise, a mixed-methods approach was used during this practitioner enquiry to explore Scottish primary teachers' understandings and attitudes towards playful pedagogy. Quantitative and qualitative data was collected in the online measures via a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. 80 primary teachers from 23 out of a possible 32 Scottish local authorities participated in the questionnaire and six participants from various primary stages were interviewed by the researcher. The researcher acknowledged and planned for potential limitations, such as positionality, and followed all ethical guidelines to complete a sound and reliable enquiry. The findings of this study will be discussed in the next chapter.

## Chapter Four: Research Findings

This chapter will explore the data collected from the two measures (an online questionnaire and an online semi-structured interview) in relation to the research questions and hypotheses.

### 4.1 Teachers' Understandings of Playful Pedagogy

The researcher explored the participants' understanding of playful pedagogy via two measures. The quantitative data was collected via the online questionnaire by inviting participants to complete an adaption of Palaiologou's (2016) scale and the qualitative data was collected via a text entry response in the online questionnaire ("How would you describe playful pedagogy?") and the same question was asked during the interview measure. Before data collection began, the researcher created a hypothesis for this factor: teachers who predominantly work within lower primary stages (Nursery to P1) will have a greater understanding of playful pedagogy in comparison to teachers who work in middle (P2 to P4) and upper (P5 to P7) primary stages.

#### 4.1.1 Quantitative Data

The researcher used IBM SPSS to transform and analyse the data. A summary of the descriptive and nonparametric statistics of the scores for teachers' understandings of playful pedagogy are presented in Table 1. The scale had a mean score of 24.53, which highlights that the average understanding score was relatively high. The small standard deviation suggests low variability, which suggests that overall the participants had a good understanding of playful pedagogy.

*Table 1. Descriptive and Nonparametric Statistics of Teachers' Understandings of Playful Pedagogy*

Variable	Mean	N	SD	Kruskal-Wallis H	Degree of Freedom	Asymptotic Significance
Teachers' Understandings of Playful Pedagogy	24.53	80	3.87	2.17	2	.339

A Kruskal-Wallis H test was used to explore the scores for the different groups. It showed that there was not a statistically significant difference in teachers' understanding between the three teaching stages (lower, middle and upper school),  $H(2) = 2.17, p = .339$ , with a mean rank understanding score of 45.61 for the lower school, 36.85 for the middle school and 38.47 for the upper school. Therefore, the quantitative data suggests that there was not a significant difference in teachers' understandings of playful pedagogy across different stages.

#### 4.1.2 Qualitative Data

The qualitative data from the online questionnaire and online, semi-structured interviews, provided the researcher with an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding. The data indicated that almost all the participants had a good understanding of what playful pedagogy was in theory. The participants' definitions were similar but highlighted different aspects of playful pedagogy: child-led learning, learning through exploration and inquiry, it supports learning and teaching and complements the CfE.

- [1] *"It's about giving children the ownership to take forward their own learning"*
- [2] *"Children learning through exploratory experiences designed to stimulate independence, creativity and collaboration"*
- [3] *"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."*
- [4] *"Opportunities for pupils to explore the Experiences and Outcomes through play, using the environment to help them."*

Participants also commented on how playful pedagogy might be used throughout primary settings, including the play types and the learning environment.

- [5] *"So you have an art area, a technology area, a building area, perhaps a writing area."*
- [6] *"So the children have a balance of adult-directed and if they aren't working with me then they will be either self-selecting or choosing where they want to go, what they want to do, or they will be completing a must-do task. That is the adult-initiated task."*

However, some participants were not able to define playful pedagogy and a small number of participants shared negative views.

- [7] *“I don’t have any experience of playful pedagogy so can’t describe what it is.”*
- [8] *“Of course there is a necessity for structured play, but from what I’ve witnessed in various early years classrooms are children jumping off of tyres and messing around.”*
- [9] *“Useless. The amount of children who fight and cry in these settings because they can’t handle the lack of structure.”*

### **4.1.3 Summary**

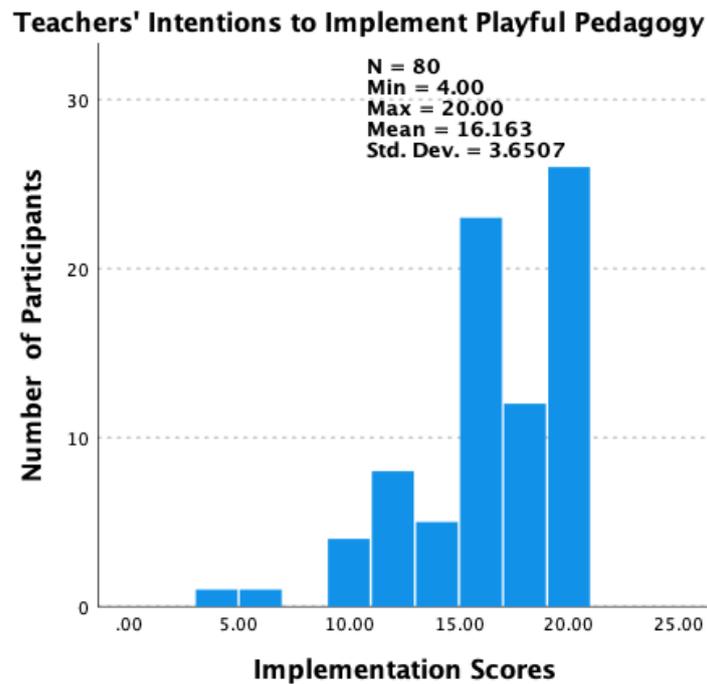
Overall, the findings suggest that most participants had a good understanding of playful pedagogy, with no significant differences in the definitions given by teachers from different stages.

## **4.2 The Implementation of Playful Pedagogy**

The participants' intentions to implement playful pedagogy were collected via two measures. An adaption of Yin, Lee and Jin’s (2011) Behavioural Intention Scale was used to collect quantitative data. Participants were also asked two questions during the online interview: “how do you use playful pedagogy within your practice?” and “how do your colleagues use playful pedagogy within their practice?”. The responses to these questions coupled with the text entry responses from the online questionnaire (participants were asked “how do you use playful pedagogy within your practice?”) provided the qualitative data. The research hypothesis for this factor was: teachers who predominantly work within lower primary stages (Nursery to P1) will implement playful pedagogy more often in comparison to teachers who work in middle (P2 to P4) and upper (P5 to P7) primary stages.

### **4.2.1 Quantitative Data**

IBM SPSS software was used by the researcher to explore the scores to determine the teachers’ intentions to implement playful pedagogy. The implementation scale had a mean score of 16.16, which indicated a relatively high intention score, with a low standard deviation showing little variance. This indicates that a large group of the participants did intend to implement playful pedagogy (see Graph 1).



*Graph 1. Distribution of the Scores of Teachers' Intentions to Implement Playful Pedagogy*

The data met the assumptions to conduct a Kruskal-Wallis H test, which showed that there was a statistically significant difference in intention scores between primary stages,  $H(2) = 10.95$ ,  $p = .004$ . The mean rank intention score for the lower school was 51.88, it was 36.28 for the middle school and 32.86 for the upper school. Post hoc analysis with a Bonferroni adjustment suggested that the participants who taught in the lower school had a statistically significant increased intention to use playful pedagogy in comparison to teachers from the middle and upper school. There was no evidence of a statistically significant difference between the intentions of middle and upper schoolteachers.

#### **4.2.2 Qualitative Data**

The qualitative data collected from the online questionnaire and interviews provided an in-depth description of how the participants implemented playful pedagogy within their practice. Across stages, common themes emerged: curricular areas which are predominantly used, the role of the classroom environment and the differences in how playful pedagogy is implemented across stages.

Participants across the stages indicated that they used playful pedagogy in various curricular areas. The most common areas were literacy, numeracy and interdisciplinary learning.

- [10] *“I feel most of the curriculum can be delivered through a play environment.”*
- [11] *“We encourage children to engage with learning from class inputs by setting up activities with numeracy, literacy or topic focus.”*
- [12] *“I have used playful pedagogy in upper school in interdisciplinary learning.”*

However, the way that practitioners applied playful pedagogy within these curricular areas differed. For example, participants who taught within upper stages used more structured, teacher-initiated play types, such as games with rules. Whereas participants from the lower school used more child-led, open-ended provocations.

- [13] *“Where possible I plan for practical activities, but this is not ‘free play’ but more of a kind of directed group work.”*
- [14] *“I currently try to incorporate play through teacher-led, structured activities.”*
- [15] *“Resources for play are carefully planned and selected to facilitate particular outcomes, however children are permitted to use the resources in a way of their choice.”*

The role that the classroom environment plays in allowing for effective implementation of playful pedagogy was also highlighted:

- [16] *“I ensure that children are given the time and correct environment to engage in quality playful learning experiences.”*
- [17] *“The playroom is set up daily with inviting areas and provocations for our children to explore and learn.”*
- [18] *“There are resources within each area of the room that might facilitate that, for example, in the home corner there might be sugar, salt, syrup and measurement tools.”*
- [19] *“Their [middle and upper school] classrooms don’t lend themselves to play as well because they still have their tables and their chairs, which they prefer to use.”*

There was a general consensus amongst participants that playful pedagogy was implemented in a more consistent, meaningful way within lower primary classrooms.

- [20] *“So I have noticed that it is predominantly used in lower school. I don’t think it really happens in the upper school to be honest...Ehm...I don’t massively see it.”*

- [21] *“In the upper school, there’s a huge difference between the lower school and the upper school and the way that play is being implemented. I think even just based on resources, lower school and nursery have so many resources for play whereas upper school doesn’t have those same things available.”*
- [22] *“I would say further down the school there’s a very, very strong understanding of play. Ehm...but up the school, I think that it is still a very unclear vision.”*

### **4.2.3 Summary**

Overall, 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 use it. The way that playful pedagogy is implemented across schools also varies depending on the stage.

## **4.3 The Potential Barriers to Embedding Playful Pedagogy**

Quantitative and qualitative data was collected to determine teachers' perceptions of barriers to playful pedagogy. Quantitative data was collected via Gray and Ryan’s (2016) scale. Qualitative data was generated from the online questionnaire and online semi-structured interview: “what are your attitudes towards playful pedagogy?” and “what do you perceive as the potential barriers to implementing playful pedagogy?”. The quantitative and qualitative data will be used to explore the research hypothesis: teachers from all stages will determine similar barriers to implementing playful pedagogy.

### **4.3.1 Quantitative Data**

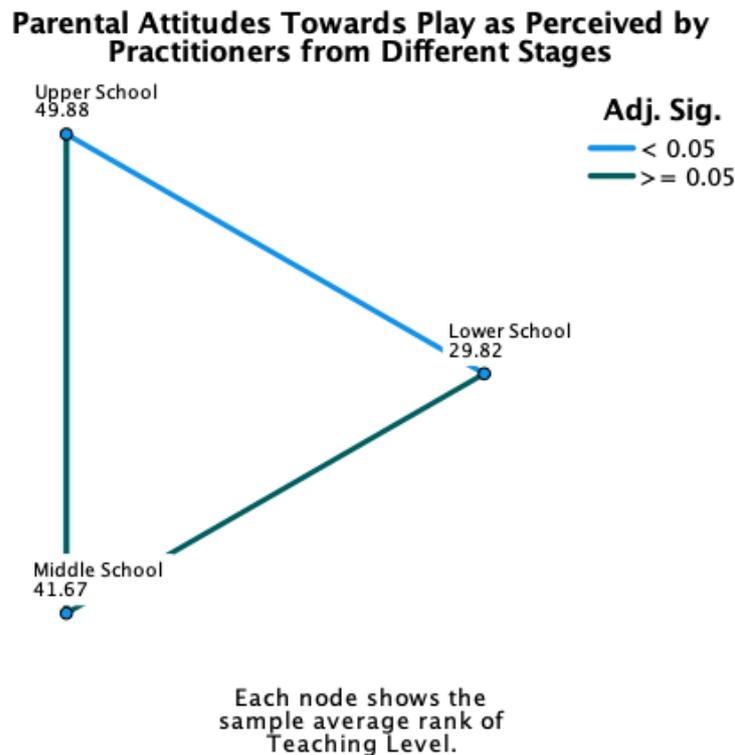
The participants indicated a relatively high mean score (see Table 2), agreeing with the items and indicating that they recognised there are several barriers to implementing playful pedagogy. A Kruskal-Wallis H test was conducted in IBM SPSS, although there was not a significant difference between participants who taught at the different stages. However, a significant difference was found for one potential barrier: the amount of value placed on play by parents.

*Table 2. Descriptive and Nonparametric Statistics of the Perceived Barriers to Implementing Playful Pedagogy*

Variable	Mean	N	SD	Kruskal-Wallis H	Degree of Freedom	Asymptotic Significance
Perceived Barriers to Implementing Playful Pedagogy	28.88	80	3.86	2.57	2	.277
Training and Awareness	4.21	80	0.82	0.78	2	.678
Class Sizes	4.01	80	1.18	1.79	2	.408
Resources and Funding	4.54	80	0.73	3.81	2	.149
Pupil-to-teacher Ratio	4.23	80	1.09	1.98	2	.372
Amount of value placed on play by teachers	4.31	80	0.87	1.59	2	.451
Amount of value placed on play by parents	3.53	80	1.13	11.64	2	.003
Teachers' Preferences	4.05	80	0.93	0.45	2	.800

A post-hoc pairwise comparison test suggested that a significant difference existed between the attitudes of teachers in the lower school (mean rank of 29.82) and teachers from the upper school (mean rank of 49.88). This is illustrated in Graph 2 and highlights that practitioners

from the lower school viewed the attitudes of parents as a lesser barrier to implementing play, in comparison to their colleagues in the upper school.



Graph 2. Pairwise Comparison of the impact of parental attitudes as a barrier to implementing playful pedagogy.

#### 4.3.2 Qualitative Data

Participants expanded on their views of potential barriers during the online interview. The quantitative measure presented participants with seven potential barriers - four of these barriers were also identified by participants in the qualitative measure. These included lack of training, lack of resources and funding, pupil-to-teacher ratios, and teachers' preferences for pedagogical approaches.

- [23] "True play is never a skive because you are always evolving and you're always building on what you've seen children do. Some practitioners don't have a good understanding and access to training, so they just don't get it!"
- [24] "We don't have the facilities in school. Like anything we need, we [teachers] need to buy it. So that's a bit frustrating because a lot of the resources you have to buy

*yourself. Like I have had to buy so many, like, shelving units, just storage units, so children can access resources for themselves.”*

- *[25] “I think they should definitely be looking at ratios. I think to do play justice there needs to be, ideally... and I know this is never going to happen... but there needs to be two people to let you fully observe and then take forward their learning.”*
- *[26] “I think it’s just the... the loss of control for teachers. Personally, I don’t like it. Like I just rather the structure and if I leave them to go and play, like what are they doing? I guess I have also seen some of their best work come from times when they have just been sat in silence with no distractions.”*

Some other barriers were also acknowledged by the participants, including lack of support from management, unmanageable workloads, a cluttered CfE and difficulties with managing and organising play.

- *[27] “So they [the School Leadership Team] will sort of say ‘do play’ but won’t really put their money where their mouth is. In terms of management, it was them that kind of encouraged me to try to do it, but again they don’t really know what they’re doing. So, they can’t really support me.”*
- *[28] “The curriculum is so cluttered; you’ve got so much work to get through that you can’t do it the justice that it deserves. So, it’s just like another thing that we have to do and that we have to learn about, when teachers are already so stretched.”*
- *[29] “For example, I have four groups and two individuals, so I think that if I’ve got a double maths lesson and I’m teaching all of them completely different skills and topics, and there’s also play within that then the management of it is quite hard. The planning of it, the organisation of it, the tracking of it.”*

Another theme emerged from the responses of participants who taught within the middle and upper school stages. Participants highlighted their concerns that implementing playful pedagogy will not prepare pupils for their transition to high school and it is easier to use within lower stages.

- *[30] “I’m not entirely sure how you balance pace and challenge with playful pedagogy in the middle and upper school. I think it’s easier to implement it in the lower school.”*

- [31] *“I think it’s not used as well in the upper primary classes. Ehm... for various reasons, maybe lack of training, maybe not seeing any good role models in upper primary and then also just trying to get through the curriculum.”*
- [32] *“I think perhaps that you need more of a balance because I guess when they go to high school they don’t get to do this. So if they are in P7 and they are play, play, play then... well it is going to be a real shock when they get to high school.”*
- [33] *“I am really, really pro play. Although I do also think that it perhaps doesn’t prepare you for moving up the school, and it definitely doesn’t prepare you for going to high school.”*

### **4.3.3 Summary**

Overall, 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 have different concerns which focus on the pace of learning and preparing learners for their transition to secondary school. This presents significant implications for practitioners and school leaders.

### **4.4 Conclusions**

To summarise, this chapter provides an overview of the responses of the participants and showcases their understanding of playful pedagogy, how they implement playful pedagogy and what they perceive as the potential barriers to implementation. The mixed-methods approach provides a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. The significance of the responses will be discussed in the next chapter.

## Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

This final chapter will summarise and discuss the study's key findings, which were introduced in Chapter Four. The researcher will then evaluate the impact of the study, first looking at its' strengths and then its' limitations. Then the research implications will be explored, including details of the dissemination strategies the researcher aims to use. Finally, the researcher will identify appropriate recommendations for how the research should be driven forward in the future.

### 5.1 Key Findings

#### 5.1.1 Teachers' Understandings of Playful Pedagogy

The first research question aimed to explore Scottish primary teachers' understandings of playful pedagogy. The findings suggest that most participants have a good understanding of playful pedagogy and there was not a significant difference in the level of understanding found for teachers who taught at different stages.

Five key themes emerged from the participants' qualitative responses. These were used to create an overarching definition of what Scottish primary teachers understand playful pedagogy to be:

*Playful pedagogy is a teaching approach which provides learners with opportunities to lead their own learning through different play types in a stimulating learning environment where pupils learn through inquiry and exploration. This is a pedagogy which supports learning and teaching across different curricular areas and complements elements of the Curriculum for Excellence.*

The results are encouraging and suggest that Scottish primary teachers do understand playful pedagogy. For example, the acknowledgement of the importance of children leading their own learning shows clear support for play approaches by Froebel, Montessori and Isaacs. However,

the depth and complexities of their understanding were not investigated and therefore cannot be commented on.

Overall, the responses had positive connotations associated with playful pedagogy, however, some negative opinions were shared. The negative responses suggest that some participants did not have experience or knowledge of play, or that they did not understand the pedagogy enough to understand the behaviours they were observing. Observing learning and interpreting behaviour during the implementation of playful pedagogy is complex, without appropriate training, adults might misinterpret behaviour (Broadhead, 2009). This provides a possible explanation as to why there are some primary teachers who are unsure about playful pedagogy.

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that Scottish primary teachers have a good understanding of playful pedagogy, however, the detail and degree of complexity remains unknown.

### **5.1.2 The Implementation of Playful Pedagogy**

The second research question reflected on Scottish primary teachers' implementation of playful pedagogy. The quantitative and qualitative data suggests that most participants intend to or already implement playful pedagogy to differing degrees, however, teachers who teach within the lower school were significantly more likely to use it in comparison to teachers from the middle and upper stages. A possible explanation for this result is a larger focus given on the benefits of playful pedagogy within early years education. Policy documents such as the CfE have many Experiences and Outcomes that are encouraged to be explored through play within Early and First level, however, similar opportunities are limited as you move beyond First level. There are gaps in the literature regarding the impact of play-based learning on older children (LEGO Foundation, 2017; Play Scotland, 2020b). However, this study has added knowledge to the field by recognising that playful pedagogy is being used in the middle and upper stages – albeit to a lesser degree.

Across primary stages, the findings suggest that the most common curricular areas that are used when delivering play-based learning are Literacy and English, and Numeracy and Mathematics. It is also used when delivering interdisciplinary learning. Within the middle and upper stages, learning is more controlled and structured by the teacher. Participants claimed to use more adult-initiated and adult-led activities which required a greater amount of adult

involvement. For example, older children have more opportunities to play games with rules. Piaget's theory of play supports the use of games with rules for older children and shows a degree of differentiation. However, using these activities prevents pupils from directing their own learning. Child-led learning was more prevalent in lower stages. Child-led learning was the most popular response from participants when asked to define playful pedagogy, yet participants out with the lower school admitted that this was something they were less likely to implement in comparison to adult-led and adult-initiated play. This suggests that they are more comfortable when they are in a position of greater control and steorage over how, what and when the learners learn.

To summarise, the findings suggest that most participants intended to or used playful pedagogy within their practice. However, there was a general consensus amongst participants that playful pedagogy was more consistent and meaningful in lower primary stages. The way that playful pedagogy is implemented also differed across primary stages, with lower stages using a combination of pupil-led, adult-led and adult-initiated activities. Whereas teachers from the middle and upper school stages claimed to be less likely to provide open-ended, child-led provocations.

### **5.1.3 The Potential Barriers to Embedding Playful Pedagogy**

The final research area which was explored in this study was the potential barriers to implementing playful pedagogy. The participants agreed with all seven items that were listed on the online questionnaire: training and awareness of playful pedagogy, class sizes, resources and funding, pupil-to-teacher ratio, the amount of value placed on play by teachers and parents, and teachers' preferences. Teachers who taught predominantly in the upper stages viewed parental views of play as a more important barrier, compared to teachers from lower stages. Information gathered during online qualitative interviews provided an insight into why this might be the case. Practitioners from lower stages shared that they had organised parent information sessions to introduce parents to playful pedagogy. Events such as open afternoons, transition afternoons and 'stay and play' sessions are some examples of meetings that teachers claimed had supported better parental support. This is supported by Breathnach and colleagues (2016) research, which highlights the positive relationship between parental engagement and parental understanding of playful pedagogy.

Four barriers included in the online questionnaire were also identified during the interviews: lack of training, limited resources and funding, class ratios and teachers' preferences. Practitioners' limited training experience in playful pedagogy is mentioned regularly within the literature. This was discussed within Chapter Two and the findings of this study support the information presented there. It also creates implications and an opportunity for education providers to review the CLPL opportunities they provide. Another barrier which has been acknowledged in previous studies is the lack of available resources and funding (Dietze and Cutler, 2020). This was echoed by numerous participants, who shared that it was commonplace for teachers to purchase resources themselves to provide play-based opportunities, from loose parts to large pieces of furniture. Play Scotland's (2021) review of Scotland's play strategy highlighted various funding opportunities, such as using the Pupil Equity Fund to purchase resources. However, they also claimed that schools had difficulties with securing additional funding that would enable teachers to implement playful pedagogy for older pupils. This could explain responses from teachers that lower school classrooms have access to more resources.

Three new potential barriers were identified in the interviews: lack of support from school management teams, balancing delivering a cluttered curriculum with a heavy workload and the management of playful pedagogy. Both the cluttered curriculum and difficulties with the management of playful pedagogy were highlighted as potential barriers in Chapter Two. These findings provide support that they are also viewed as potential barriers by Scottish primary teachers. However, there is limited evidence in the literature that teachers view management support as a barrier, and it was not included in the original scale by Gray and Ryan (2016). It was clear that practitioners need to be able to turn to their management teams for support but are unable to.

Teachers who taught in the middle and upper school stages highlighted concerns that playful pedagogy does not support learners as they transition from primary school to high school. This chapter has previously discussed the tension between playful pedagogy and elements of the CfE as learners progress past First level. Secondary schools adopt different pedagogy to meet the learner's needs. Playful pedagogy is based on play theories which originated in early child development, therefore would it be appropriate to apply this pedagogy to older learners? Research suggests that playful pedagogy supports older learners (Mardell et al., 2016), however, more research must be conducted within this area.

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that the participants are aware of the potential barriers. Some barriers can be managed by the practitioners with some support from colleagues, such as changing parental attitudes or engaging in training. However, there are barriers which require support from school leadership teams, local authorities or at a national level, such as the amount of funding available to purchase resources and ensuring the CfE and other policy documents are compatible with playful pedagogy for all learners.

## **5.2 Evaluation**

### **5.2.1 Strengths and the Impact of the Study**

This study explored 80 primary teachers' attitudes and understandings of playful pedagogy and invited participants from different primary stages from across Scotland. The researcher identified a gap in the literature regarding the current playful pedagogy 'climate' across Scotland and across different primary stages. This study succeeded on both fronts. Practitioners from 23 out of a possible 32 local authorities participated, providing an overview of teaching practices nationally. Also, the findings have shown that teachers across stages have a good understanding of playful pedagogy and are keen to implement it. However, the way it is implemented and the barriers to ensuring its success differ from the lower school to the middle and upper school stages. Practitioners also agree that playful pedagogy is more consistent and meaningful in lower primary stages. The results also indicate that there is an appetite from practitioners to develop their knowledge of playful pedagogy.

This study provides practitioners with an opportunity to develop their knowledge of playful pedagogy and reflect on their practice. The findings present responses from participants who are class teachers and offer practical experiences and opinions. The participants who took part in the study benefited from engaging in the measures, which enabled them to self-reflect on their understanding and use of playful pedagogy. The study also presents an opportunity for school leadership teams, local authorities and policymakers to reflect on some of the barriers identified by practitioners which are preventing the implementation of playful pedagogy.

The research topic was chosen as it was of personal interest to the researcher, in the wake of COVID-19 as educators attempted to reintroduce playful pedagogy back into the classrooms. This research project provided them with a structured way of learning about playful pedagogy.

This allowed them to make connections with practitioners when discussing their research and seeking more opportunities to observe different learning environments, which they then shared with colleagues. This impacted their whole school and triggered discussions around playful pedagogy, which supported the Local Authority's response to the Play Strategy (East Renfrewshire Council, 2021a). The GTCS (2021) highlights the importance of practitioner enquiry and self-reflection in the Professional Standards: Standard 3.3 Professional Learning. Participating in the MEd Professional Practice and completing this research project allowed the researcher to engage critically with key literature and policy and they have shown commitment to engaging in reflective practice, which has benefited the learning and teaching they have provided their learners.

### **5.2.2 Limitations of the Study**

Despite the strengths of the study, there were some limitations which must be considered when discussing the findings. Firstly, the researcher invited Scottish primary teachers to participate online to gain the views of teachers across Scotland. There was a lot of interest, and the online questionnaire closed after 72 hours as it reached the maximum number of participants, they had gained ethical approval for. Future studies may want to expand this and aim to gain more responses to add more power to the results. Another limitation of the study is the gender split amongst the participants. In Scotland, 89% of primary teachers identify as female and 11% as male (Scottish Government, 2021c). Only 5% of the responses in this study were from individuals who identified as male. This limits the generalisability of the findings as the sample is unrepresentative of the current Scottish primary teaching profession. It was not attainable to guarantee a representative sample due to the sampling technique employed. However, it should be considered when applying the findings. A final limitation of the study centres around the online questionnaire. The researcher and participants encountered no problems during the online interviews, and all felt comfortable with using the programme. It is common to receive incomplete or missing data from online surveys, in comparison to paper-based measures (Lefever, Dal and Matthíasdóttir, 2007), although this was not a problem for this study. However, the researcher was aware of other potential problems, such as self-selection bias. Self-selection bias can occur when individuals can choose whether to participate in the research (Bethlehem, 2010) and can cause some potential problems. For example, an individual might choose to participate in the research because they are interested in playful pedagogy, hence this motivation limits the researcher's ability to generalise the results to the general teaching population (Olsen, 2008). The researcher was aware of these potential limitations when

designing the research project, however, the potential weaknesses outweighed the benefits of using an online model to gain meaningful information to explore the views of primary teachers throughout Scotland quickly and effectively.

### **5.3 Dissemination Strategies**

One of the criteria for this dissertation report was to create a piece of educational research that has clear relevance to support the development of professional practice. The impact of this study on the researcher's professional practice has been referenced in this chapter and throughout. However, the impact goes further than the individual. The dissemination of the study is an important stage within the research cycle (Trainor and Graue, 2014) and it has the potential to support the development of other practitioners too.

The researcher has recently moved schools within their local authority and will begin teaching in a different establishment in August 2022. However, it provides them with an opportunity to share their research with their colleagues from their previous school and engage with their new colleagues too. Their colleagues supported the research through engagement in professional dialogues and volunteering to participate, which created further discussions around playful pedagogy and different approaches used in the school. Therefore, sending an academic poster via email would be an appropriate way of sharing a summary of the study. The researcher's new management team is also keen to schedule time for the researcher to share their research with the rest of the school team, such as a presentation at a staff meeting. The Quality Improvement Officer, who has a keen interest in developing playful pedagogy within the local authority, will be sent the final report with permission to share it further within the authority via GLOW or at a CLPL session.

The researcher used social media to recruit participants and they also see the value in using this tool when sharing their research. Social media provides researchers with an opportunity to engage in two-way communication with stakeholders, which traditional methods do not allow (Gori et al., 2020). The researcher will use Rodrigues' (2021) model to create a visual abstract with relevant hashtags (such as #EdVisualAbstract) to share the study on their professional Twitter page, LinkedIn profile and the Scottish Primary Teacher network on Facebook. Research suggests that using visuals to disseminate research leads to greater engagement (Rodrigues, 2021). Disseminating the research via social media presents the opportunity to

engage in meaningful, professional online discussions with practitioners both locally, nationally, and perhaps internationally.

Throughout the research process, the researcher has become increasingly engaged and passionate about developing their knowledge and practice within playful pedagogy. They requested to spend another year teaching in the lower school to continue to learn more about playful pedagogy and it has become an area they would like to focus on in their career. The researcher is committed to participating in additional opportunities, such as the University of Glasgow's Postgraduate Student autumn 'Unconference', that will allow them to share their knowledge to support the development of playful pedagogy within Scotland.

#### **5.4 Recommendations**

The results of this study suggest that Scottish primary teachers have a good understanding of playful pedagogy, and they have a desire to implement it. However, there are barriers which prevent them from doing so. The researcher's recommendations will focus on each of these areas.

Firstly, the findings suggest that practitioners know what playful pedagogy is, however, the results cannot suggest the level of expertise they hold. Future research may investigate the depth of teachers' knowledge to make an effective assessment of current knowledge and determine what next steps and CLPL is needed. The literature review clearly states the importance of playful pedagogy on learning within the early primary stages, therefore practitioners who predominantly work with younger children should prioritise this as an area of professional development on an ongoing basis to ensure their practice is evidence-informed and updated.

In terms of implementation, the study suggests that practitioners at different primary stages are keen to use playful pedagogy or already use it within their classrooms. Two barriers which were identified were lack of training and resources. The study highlights a positive view of playful pedagogy within Scotland and illustrates that there are practitioners with expertise in this area, but there are also teachers who don't have their level of knowledge and view it as a barrier. Researchers have highlighted the benefits of peer observation (Pressick-Kilborn and te Riele, 2009; Dos Santos, 2017). However, the practicalities of organising and managing

timetables and workload can make this challenging (Richards and Lockhart, 1991). Modern technology has provided a potential solution. Trust (2016) advocates for online networks where practitioners can share their practice within a particular area. They also highlight the importance of ensuring the support is relevant to the contexts the teachers are working in. Local authorities or regions could create an online platform for practitioners to share their ideas. A national network broken down into different stages may be useful, however, Trust (2016) highlights the importance of locality when networking to ensure the information is relevant. For example, each local authority uses different skills planners and have different expectations. This could provide worthwhile opportunities for practitioners to develop their knowledge of how to implement playful pedagogy and use different resources effectively.

Future research should aim to explore the barriers to implementing playful pedagogy in more depth. Recommendations for addressing the lack of training and resources have been discussed. However, these were only two of the barriers that Scottish teachers identified. There are certain barriers which can be managed by practitioners themselves. For example, the researcher identified their lack of knowledge of managing and organising resources as a barrier during a self-reflection task. They were able to address this barrier by observing other teachers and engaging with research articles. This supported them to alter the way they organised their provocations to improve efficiency and the experiences for their learners. However, there are some barriers which require support from management and policymakers, such as funding, providing adequate training and re-examining the cluttered curriculum. It is recommended that more research is conducted with participants across Scotland to determine feasible approaches to dissolving the barriers to ensure all learners experience playful pedagogy during their primary education.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

This study aimed to explore Scottish primary teachers' attitudes and understandings of playful pedagogy to provide a snapshot of how the pedagogy is being used post-pandemic and support the researcher's own personal development within this area. More specifically it investigated practitioners' understandings, their experience of using playful pedagogy and potential barriers to implementing the pedagogy. It drew on primary teachers' experiences across Scotland, with varying levels of experience and from different primary stages. The findings suggest that primary teachers have a good understanding of playful pedagogy, and most practitioners intend

to or already implement elements of playful pedagogy. However, the results suggest that practitioners utilise different strategies based on the stage they are teaching. There was also an overarching agreement amongst participants that playful pedagogy was more consistent and meaningful in lower primary stages. Practitioners could identify the barriers which prevented them from implementing playful pedagogy, which presents implications for school leadership teams and education managers at local and national levels. These findings provide an insight into Scottish primary classrooms and the play-based experiences that are currently being offered. Playful pedagogy is sometimes considered a modern approach to learning, however, this report highlighted the long history play has had in schooling and child development. This is a widely accepted pedagogy amongst educators, which the findings of this study support. However, tensions remain between playful pedagogy and Scottish primary education. It is therefore suggested that educators continue to develop their understanding of playful pedagogy and work in partnership with colleagues to resolve the problems to ensure that all learners within Scotland can experience this meaningful pedagogy during their primary education.

## APPENDICES

Appendix 1	Ethical Approval
Appendix 2	Plain Language Statement (Questionnaire)
Appendix 3	Consent Form (Questionnaire)
Appendix 4	Privacy Notice
Appendix 5	Questionnaire
Appendix 6	Plain Language Statement (Interview)
Appendix 7	Consent Form (Interview)
Appendix 8	Interview Schedule
Appendix 9	Research Advert

## Appendix 1: Ethical Approval



25 February 2022

Dear Willie,

**School of Education Research Ethics Committee**

**Project Title:** Cohort Approval for MEd Professional Practice

**Application No:** 402210061 (Group Approval)

The School of Education Research Ethics Committee has reviewed your application and has agreed that there is no objection on ethical grounds to the proposed group application. It is happy therefore to approve this application, subject to the following conditions:

- Start date of ethical approval: 03/01/22
- Project end date: 30/09/22
- Procedures for approving individual projects under this umbrella application are as sent in separate document
- Any proposed changes in the protocol should be submitted for reassessment as an amendment to the original application. The *Request for Amendments to an Approved Application* form should be used:  
<https://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/education/research/ethics/forms/>

Thank-you for establishing a group ethics approval application for your programme and for your patience with the process this year.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P Lynch'.

Dr Paul Lynch  
School of Education Ethics Officer

**Dr Paul Lynch, Senior Lecturer in Inclusive Education**  
**School of Education Ethics Officer**  
University of Glasgow  
School of Education, St Andrew's Building, 11 Eldon Street  
Glasgow G3 6NH  
Paul.Lynch@glasgow.ac.uk

## Appendix 2: Plain Language Statement (Questionnaire)



### Plain Language Statement

#### Title of project and researcher details:

Investigating Scottish Primary Teachers' Attitudes and Knowledge of Playful Pedagogy

Researcher: Abbey McNeil

Supervisor: Dr Julie Shaughnessy

Course: MEd Professional Practice

You are being invited to take part in a research project into Scottish primary teachers' attitudes and knowledge of playful pedagogy.

Before you decide if you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the information on this page carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish your child to take part.

I hope that this sheet will answer any questions you have about the study.

#### 1. What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to find out Scottish primary teachers' attitudes and knowledge of playful pedagogy.

#### 2. Why have I been chosen?

You are being asked to take part because you are a qualified primary teacher who is currently teaching within Scotland.

#### 3. Do I have to take part?

You do not have to take part in this study. If, after you have started to take part, you change your mind you are free to withdraw at any time, just let me know and I will not use any of the data you have given me in my writing.

#### **4. What will happen to me if I take part?**

If you take part, you will complete an online questionnaire about playful pedagogy and following that if you would like to be interviewed you will give consent for this. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. This will take about 20 minutes. I will record the answers on a voice recorder so that afterwards I can listen carefully to what was said. I will be finished gathering data by June 2022.

#### **5. Will the information that I give you in this study be kept confidential?**

I will keep all the data I collect in a locked file on my computer. When I write about what I have found, your name will not be mentioned. You may choose a pseudonym which I will use when writing up the final assignment.

However, if during our conversation I hear anything which makes me worried that you might be in danger of harm, I might have to inform relevant agencies of this.

#### **6. What will happen to the results of this study**

I will analyse the data I collect from the participants and present this in the dissertation which I am writing for my qualification, MEd Professional Practice. Participants will receive a written summary of the findings and I will also present the information to colleagues. I will destroy the data at the end of the project.

#### **7. Who has reviewed the study?**

This study has been reviewed and agreed by the School of Education Ethics Forum, University of Glasgow

#### **8. Who can I contact for further information?**

If you have any questions about this study, you can ask me, Abbey McNeil (2192867M@student.gla.ac.uk) or my supervisor, Dr Julie Shaughnessy (Julie.shaughnessy@glasgow.ac.uk) or the Ethics officer for the School of Education, Dr Paul Lynch ([paul.lynch@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:paul.lynch@glasgow.ac.uk))

Thank you for reading this.

### Appendix 3: Consent Form (Questionnaire)



#### Consent Form

#### *Questionnaire*

Title of Project: Investigating Scottish Primary Teachers' Attitudes and Knowledge of Playful Pedagogy

Researcher: Abbey McNeil

Supervisor: Dr Julie Shaughnessy

Course: MEd Professional Practice

I confirm that I have read and understood the Plain Language Statement for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

I acknowledge that participants will not be referred to by name.

- ♦ All names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised.
- ♦ The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.

- ◆ The material will be destroyed once the project is complete.
- ◆ I understand that other authenticated researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.

I acknowledge the provision of a Privacy Notice in relation to this research project.

I agree / do not agree (delete as applicable) to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant ..... Signature .....

Date .....

Name of Researcher ..... Signature .....

Date .....

## Appendix 4: Privacy Notice

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**Privacy Notice for Participation in Research Project:** Investigating Scottish Primary Teachers' Attitudes and Knowledge of Playful Pedagogy (Researcher: Abbey McNeil)

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### Your Personal Data

**The University of Glasgow** will be what's known as the 'Data Controller' of your personal data processed in relation to your participation in the research project: Investigating Scottish Primary Teachers' Attitudes and Knowledge of Playful Pedagogy. This privacy notice will explain how The University of Glasgow will process your personal data.

### Why we need it

We are collecting basic personal data such as your name and contact details in order to conduct our research. We need your name and contact details to arrange interviews or potentially follow up on the data you have provided.

We only collect data that we need for the research project and we will de-identify your personal data from the research data.

Please see accompanying **Plain Language Statement**.

### Legal basis for processing your data

We must have a legal basis for processing all personal data. As this processing is for Academic Research we will be relying upon **Task in the Public Interest** in order to process the basic personal data that you provide. For any special categories data collected we will be processing this on the basis that it is **necessary for archiving purposes, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes**

Alongside this, in order to fulfil our ethical obligations, we will ask for your **Consent** to take part in the study Please see accompanying **Consent Form**.

### What we do with it and who we share it with

All the personal data you submit is processed by staff or students at the University of Glasgow in the United Kingdom. In addition, security measures are in place to ensure that your personal data remains safe, for example secure data storage through the encryption of files and devices. Please consult the **Consent form** and **Plain Language Statement** which accompanies this notice.

We will provide you with a copy of the study findings and details of any subsequent publications or outputs on request.

### **What are your rights?**

GDPR provides that individuals have certain rights including: to request access to, copies of and rectification or erasure of personal data and to object to processing. In addition, data subjects may also have the right to restrict the processing of the personal data and to data portability. You can request access to the information we process about you at any time.

If at any point you believe that the information we process relating to you is incorrect, you can request to see this information and may in some instances request to have it restricted, corrected, or erased. You may also have the right to object to the processing of data and the right to data portability.

Please note that as we are processing your personal data for research purposes, the ability to exercise these rights may vary as there are potentially applicable research exemptions under the GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. For more information on these exemptions, please see [UofG Research with personal and special categories of data](#).

If you wish to exercise any of these rights, please submit your request via the [webform](#) or contact [dp@gla.ac.uk](mailto:dp@gla.ac.uk)

### **Complaints**

If you wish to raise a complaint on how we have handled your personal data, you can contact the University Data Protection Officer who will investigate the matter.

Our Data Protection Officer can be contacted at [dataprotectionofficer@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:dataprotectionofficer@glasgow.ac.uk)

If you are not satisfied with our response or believe we are not processing your personal data in accordance with the law, you can complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) <https://ico.org.uk/>

### **Who has ethically reviewed the project?**

This project has been ethically approved via the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee or relevant School Ethics Forum in the College.

### **How long do we keep it for?**

Your **personal** data will be retained by the University only for as long as is necessary for processing and no longer than the period of ethical approval (August 2022). After this time, personal data will be securely deleted.

Your **research** data will be retained for a period of ten years in line with the University of Glasgow Guidelines. Specific details in relation to research data storage are

provided on the Plain Language Statement and Consent Form which accompany this notice.

## Appendix 5: Questionnaire

### Participant Information

3. Which gender do you identify as?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say

4. Please state your age.

- 20 - 24 years old
- 25 - 34 years old
- 35 - 44 years old
- 45 - 54 years old
- 55 - 64 years old
- 65 and over

## Participant Experiences

5. Which stage(s) do you predominantly work with?

- Nursery
- P1
- P2
- P3
- P4
- P5
- P6
- P7

6. Which Local Authority do you work in?

- Aberdeen City Council
- Aberdeenshire Council
- Angus Council
- Argyll and Bute Council
- City of Edinburgh Council
- Clackmannanshire Council
- Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
- Dumfries and Galloway Council
- Dundee City Council
- East Ayrshire Council
- East Dunbartonshire
- East Lothian Council
- East Renfrewshire Council
- Falkirk Council
- Fife Council

- 
- Glasgow City Council
  - Inverclyde Council
  - Midlothian Council
  - North Ayrshire
  - North Lanarkshire
  - Orkney Islands Council
  - Perth and Kinross Council
  - Renfrewshire Council
  - Scottish Borders Council
  - Shetland Islands Council
  - South Ayrshire Council
  - South Lanarkshire Council
  - Stirling Council
  - The Highland Council
  - The Moray Council
  - West Dunbartonshire Council
  - West Lothian Council

7. Do you consider yourself to work within a school in a rural or urban area?

- Rural Area
- Urban Area

8. How many years have you been teaching?

- <1 year
- 1-5 years
- 5-10 years
- 10-15 years
- 15+ years

## Your Understanding of Playful Pedagogy

9. How would you describe playful pedagogy?

10. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

Play-based pedagogy is offering an environment where children have opportunities to explore first hand experiences, to enjoy themselves and at the same time help them to develop and learn through play. ^

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Undecided
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

---

Play-based pedagogy is based on play where children are actively involved and self-motivated and it activates their physical, cognitive, emotional, and social skills. v

---

Play-based pedagogy is based on teachers facilitating children's play for their development and learning. 

---

Play-based pedagogy is the creation of an environment where children have opportunities to re-enact life experiences for educational purposes. 

---

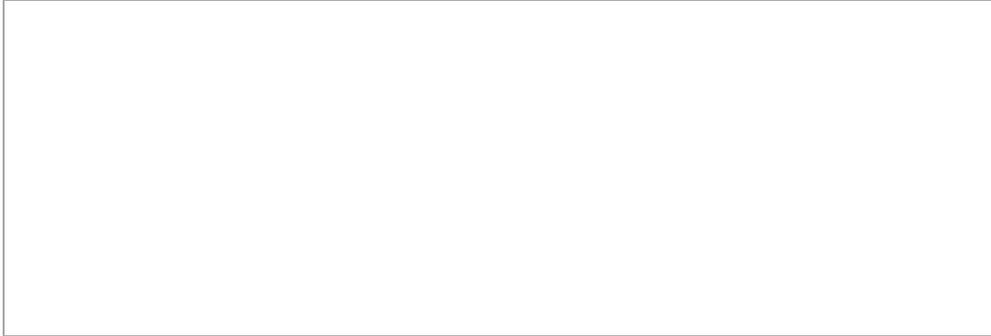
Play-based pedagogy is a planned educational environment where play is a central element to support children's development and learning. 

---

Play-based pedagogy is an environment where children re-enact life scenarios through play. 

## The Implementation of Playful Pedagogy

11. How do you use playful pedagogy within your practice?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to provide their answer to the question above.

12. Please indicate your responses to the statements.

I will actively and openly support the implementation of learning through play within my practice. 

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Undecided
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

---

I will agree to implement learning through play within my school. 

---

I will propose the implementation of learning through play in my behaviour and communication with other teachers. 

---

I will tell my colleagues that learning through play is feasible to be implemented in this school. 

## Potential Barriers

13. Please indicate the extent to which you agree that the following statements could act as potential barriers to implementing playful pedagogy.

Training and awareness



Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Undecided

Agree

Strongly Agree

---

Class size



---

Resources and funding



---

Pupil-to-teacher ratio



---

The amount of value placed on play by teachers



---

The amount of value placed on play by parents



---

Teachers' preferences in learning approaches



## Follow-Up Interview Information

14. Do you volunteer to participate in a 20 minute follow-up interview with the researcher? (The interview will taken place via Zoom). \*

Yes

No

15. Thank you for indicating that you would be interested in participating in a follow-up interview. Please include your name and an email address that you would be happy for the researcher to contact you via. \*

16. Confirm your email address. \*

---

4/14/2022

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Microsoft. The data you submit will be sent to the form owner.

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/DesignPage.aspx?lang=en-GB&...K4XLI5zBxJoiQSuj90W1IUMTMONTU4UjJaQUVSM0VFQlpaMElyMjU4Ry4u>

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## Appendix 6: Plain Language Statement (Interview)



### Plain Language Statement

#### Title of project and researcher details:

Investigating Scottish Primary Teachers' Attitudes and Knowledge of Playful Pedagogy

Researcher: Abbey McNeil

Supervisor: Dr Julie Shaughnessy

Course: MEd Professional Practice

You are being invited to take part in a research project into Scottish primary teachers' attitudes and knowledge of playful pedagogy.

Before you decide if you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the information on this page carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish your child to take part.

I hope that this sheet will answer any questions you have about the study.

#### 1. What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to find out Scottish primary teachers' attitudes and knowledge of playful pedagogy.

#### 2. Why have I been chosen?

You are being asked to take part because you are a qualified primary teacher who is currently teaching within Scotland.

#### 3. Do I have to take part?

You do not have to take part in this study. If, after you have started to take part, you change your mind you are free to withdraw at any time, just let me know and I will not use any of the data you have given me in my writing.

#### **4. What will happen to me if I take part?**

If you take part, you will complete an online questionnaire about playful pedagogy and following that if you would like to be interviewed you will give consent for this. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. This will take about 20 minutes. I will record the answers on a voice recorder so that afterwards I can listen carefully to what was said. I will be finished gathering data by June 2022.

#### **5. Will the information that I give you in this study be kept confidential?**

I will keep all the data I collect in a locked file on my computer. When I write about what I have found, your name will not be mentioned. You may choose a pseudonym which I will use when writing up the final assignment.

However, if during our conversation I hear anything which makes me worried that you might be in danger of harm, I might have to inform relevant agencies of this.

#### **6. What will happen to the results of this study**

I will analyse the data I collect from the participants and present this in the dissertation which I am writing for my qualification, MEd Professional Practice. Participants will receive a written summary of the findings and I will also present the information to colleagues. I will destroy the data at the end of the project.

#### **7. Who has reviewed the study?**

This study has been reviewed and agreed by the School of Education Ethics Forum, University of Glasgow

#### **8. Who can I contact for further Information?**

If you have any questions about this study, you can ask me, Abbey McNeil (2192867M@student.gla.ac.uk) or my supervisor, Dr Julie Shaughnessy (Julie.shaughnessy@glasgow.ac.uk) or the Ethics officer for the School of Education, Dr Paul Lynch ([paul.lynch@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:paul.lynch@glasgow.ac.uk))

Thank you for reading this.

## Appendix 7: Consent Form (Interview)



### Consent Form

Title of Project: Investigating Scottish Primary Teachers' Attitudes and Knowledge of Playful Pedagogy

Researcher: Abbey McNeil

Supervisor: Dr Julie Shaughnessy

Course: MEd Professional Practice

I confirm that I have read and understood the Plain Language Statement for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

I acknowledge that participants will not be referred to by name.

- ♦ All names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised.

- ♦ The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.
- ♦ The material will be destroyed once the project is complete.
- ♦ I understand that other authenticated researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.

I acknowledge the provision of a Privacy Notice in relation to this research project.

I consent / do not consent (delete as applicable) to interviews being audio-recorded.

I agree / do not agree (delete as applicable) to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant .....

Signature .....

Date .....

## Appendix 8: Interview Schedule

### *Interview Schedule*

#### Section 1: Opening

a. **(Establish Rapport)**

My name is **x** and I am a primary teacher in Scotland, I am really interested in hearing your views on playful pedagogy. So, thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. I have been teaching for two years within East Renfrewshire Council and I have become increasingly interested in playful pedagogy since moving into the lower school.

b. **(Ethics)**

Can you confirm that you have received and read the Information Sheet and Privacy Notice?

Can you also confirm that you have completed the consent form?

c. **(Purpose)**

I would like to ask you some questions about your background and your views on playful pedagogy in order to learn more about learning through play within the current Scottish context.

d. **(Motivation)**

I hope to use this information to inform my dissertation, which I'm completing as I am participating in the MEd Professional Practice course at the University of Glasgow.

e. **(Timeline)**

This interview should take about 20 minutes. Are you available to respond to some questions at this time?

**Transition:** Let me begin by asking you some questions about your background.

#### Section 2: Body

a. **(Topic) Teaching Background**

1. Which primary stage do you predominantly work with?

2. Which Local Authority do you work in?

3. How many years have you been teaching?

**Transition:** Thank you for this information. I would now like to explore your understandings of playful pedagogy.

**b. (Topic) Teachers' Understandings of Playful Pedagogy**

1. How would you describe playful pedagogy?

**Transition:** Great, so let's look at how you implement playful pedagogy.

**c. (Topic) Implementation of Playful Pedagogy**

1. How do you use playful pedagogy within your practice?

2. How do your colleagues use playful pedagogy within their practice?

**Transition:** I would now like to move onto the final section.

**d. (Topic) Potential Barriers**

1. What are your attitudes towards playful pedagogy?

2. What do you perceive as the potential barriers to playful pedagogy?

**Transition:** Well, it has been a pleasure finding out more about your views and your practice.

### Section 3: Closing

**a. (Maintain Rapport)**

I appreciate the time you have taken out of your busy schedule today. Is there anything else you think would be helpful for me to know?

**b. (Closing)**

I should have all the information I need. If you have any questions or wish to contact me about anything we have discussed then you can use the details on the Information Sheet. My email address is [2192867M@student.gla.ac.uk](mailto:2192867M@student.gla.ac.uk) Thank you again for your time and I wish you every success in the future.

## Appendix 9: Research Advert



# Are you a primary teacher in Scotland?



Recruiting **Scottish primary teachers** that are interested in participating in an **online research** study about **playful pedagogy**.



### What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to find out **Scottish primary teachers' attitudes and knowledge of playful pedagogy**. This research is being carried out to fulfil the dissertation requirements of the MEd Professional Practice at the University of Glasgow.

### What happens if I take part?

If you take part, you will complete **an online questionnaire** about playful pedagogy and following that if you would like to be interviewed you will give consent for this. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. This will take about **20 minutes**.

### Participant Requirements:

You **must** be a qualified primary teacher who is currently working within Scotland.

### Interested?

Contact the researcher (Abbey McNeil) for more information: [2192867m@student.gla.ac.uk](mailto:2192867m@student.gla.ac.uk) or click the link below.

Dissertation Supervisor: Dr Julie Shaughnessy  
([Julie.Shaughnessu@Glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Julie.Shaughnessu@Glasgow.ac.uk))

<https://forms.office.com/r/dQn5P1Dr1N>

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