**Abstract**

**Investigating Scottish Primary Teachers’ Attitudes and Knowledge of Playful Pedagogy**

*Abbey McNeil*

Abstract (549 words)

*Background:*

In 2020, the learning experiences of millions of learners were drastically changed with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the recent relaxation in COVID-19 mitigations has allowed practitioners to reintroduce playful pedagogy back into their classrooms. Playful pedagogy is an approach which spans from work by Friedrich Froebel in the 1800s to more recent developments; elements of which can be found in Scottish policy documents, such as ‘Realising the Ambition: Curriculum for Excellence’ (Scottish Government, 2020). Play within the Scottish curriculum “values children’s contributions to their own learning and offers opportunities for children to take ownership of their learning” (Moyles, 2015 as cited in Scottish Government, 2020: 47). This practitioner enquiry investigated this by exploring Scottish primary teachers’ attitudes and knowledge of playful pedagogy post-pandemic.

*Aim:*

The aim of this practitioner enquiry was to explore teachers’ understandings of playful pedagogy, how they implement it and the potential barriers to the successful implementation of play-based learning.

*Method:*

This practitioner enquiry used a mixed methods approach. The sample consisted of 80 Scottish primary teachers 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.

*Results:*

The findings of the study suggest that Scottish primary teachers have a good understanding of playful pedagogy, with no significant differences in the definitions provided by teachers from different stages. Positive attitudes towards implementing playful pedagogy were also highlighted by practitioners. However, the way that the pedagogy is implemented across schools and stages varies. The findings suggest that practitioners in lower primary stages (Nursery and Primary One) are more likely to implement playful pedagogical approaches compared to their colleagues in older stages. In terms of barriers to implementation, practitioners from different stages identified similar problems, such as lack of training, lack of support from management and delivering a cluttered curriculum. However, some barriers were unique to middle and upper schoolteachers, which centred around the importance of preparing learners for the transition to secondary school.

*Conclusions:*

This research investigated 80 primary teachers’ attitudes and understandings of playful pedagogy. It provided evidence that overall, there is a positive attitude toward playful pedagogy across Scotland. However, some differences were found in the responses provided by teachers at different primary stages. For example, it was suggested that playful pedagogy is implemented more consistently and meaningful in lower primary stages. The findings also suggest that there is a strong appetite from practitioners to develop their understanding of playful pedagogy, however, there are significant barriers preventing them from doing so.

*Recommendations:*

This practitioner enquiry suggests that practitioners have a desire to implement playful pedagogy, however, there are barriers which prevent this. There are barriers which can be overcome by practitioners themselves, such as prioritising playful pedagogy as an area of professional development. However, there are some barriers that require support from school leadership teams and local authorities to overcome. Recommendations for management include creating an online network to provide teachers with an opportunity to share good practices at different primary stages and to re-examine the training and funding available.