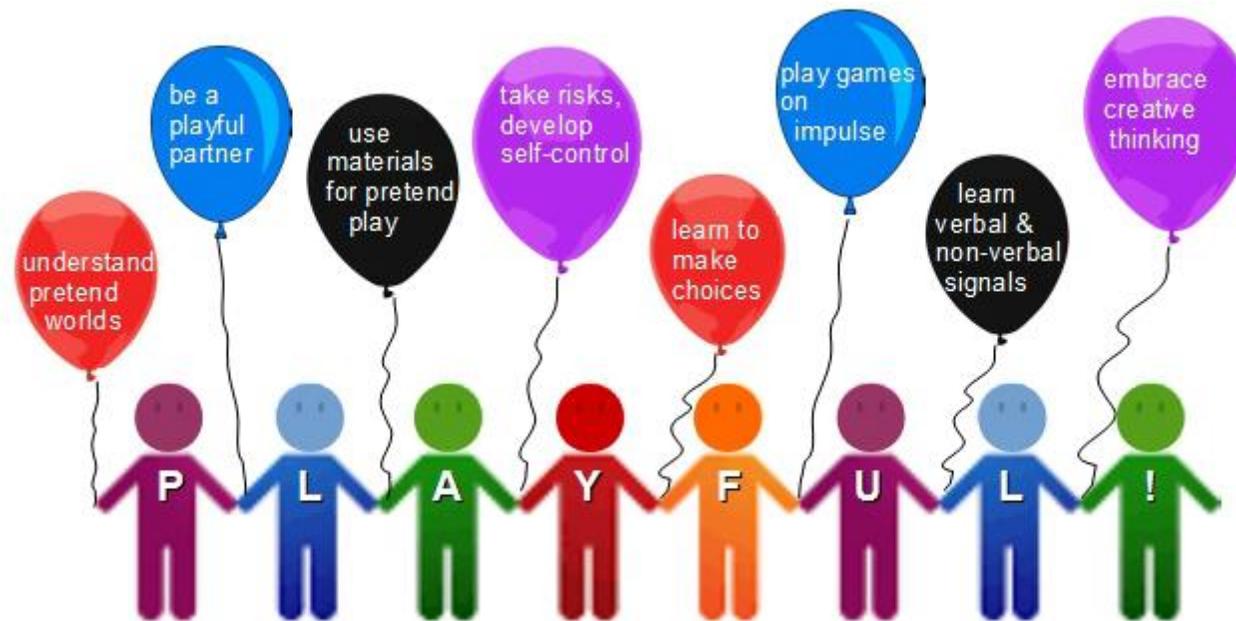


# Play to Learn in East Dunbartonshire Council Audit document (2017)



Attributes of playfulness (Inspired by Thomas and Harding, 2011)

## **Introduction and context**

East Dunbartonshire Council's vision is 'achieving equity and excellence for all learners', which reflects the national context including the National Improvement Framework.

In recognition that all children learn at a different pace and in different ways, in session 2016-2017 it was identified by the Quality Improvement Officer with the Early Level remit that there was potential to introduce more play experiences into Primary 1 across mainstream schools. Authority self-evaluations had highlighted that there was potential to build on good practice already established in EDC's Early Years centres to offer a 'play approach' to learning in Primary 1, thus ensuring a seamless transition from nursery to school. Areas for change included the physical classroom environment, resources used by learners and pedagogical approaches used by staff.

Child development theorists offer perspectives of how children learn at the different stages of childhood, and at the Primary 1 stage in Scotland children are aged between 4 and 6:

**Friedrich Froebel**, writing in the early 1800s, believed play was central to child development and believed that teachers should encourage self-expression through play, rather than teaching by rote.

**Lev Vygotsky** (writing in the 1930s, work published in English in 1970s): advocated that children learn within social interactions and are active partners in their own learning. The adult's role is to 'scaffold' the child's development by extending their skills through the understanding the child's 'zone of proximal development' (uplevelling their play)

**Erik Erikson** (1950s/60s): (8 stages across the lifespan) proposed that at the pre-school to P1 stage, which Erikson calls 'initiative versus guilt', children are seen as either gaining a sense of initiative by being able to make decisions, plan activities and see them carried through or else a feeling of guilt if they are continually 'squashed' and told 'no' by adults.

**Jean Piaget** (1960s): believed that children are active learners – he proposed that children's thinking passes through 4 separate stages and the 'pre-operational' stage is age 2-7 years. In this stage children require concrete learning opportunities and are not yet abstract thinkers.

**Jerome Bruner** (1960s onwards): proposed that children's cognitive development happens through self-directed discovery learning, where the child makes the connections between language and thought, learns skills for later life through the play experience.

**Urie Bronfenbrenner** (1970 and 80s): was a proponent of an ecological (environmental) model of child development, where the school age child's development very much depends on the interactions they have with their environment (including their family).

In addition, a growing body of local and international research is focusing on play and learning, and play and wellbeing in the early primary school years:

- The right to play is recognised for all children in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).
- Psychologists have suggested that spontaneous play is natural and healthy for children and children learn best through play. Through play all areas of child development can be enhanced: social, emotional, physical, cognitive, language and literacy skills and self-regulation (Ginsburg, 2007).
- Experimental psychologists have demonstrated the superior learning and motivation that arises from playful, as opposed to instructional approaches to early education (Moyles, 2011).
- UK Department of Education (2004) research highlighted that an extended period of play-based early education made a significant difference to learning and well-being though the primary school years (Sylva et al for the EPPE Project).
- Research from the US highlighted that by the end of elementary (primary) school, children whose early school experiences had been academically directed earned significantly lower academic grades compared to children who had attended child-initiated classes: children's later school success appears to have been enhanced by more active, child-initiated early learning experiences (Marcon, 2002).
- Some child development experts are concerned that there is an increase in stress and mental health problems amongst children whose playful experiences in childhood education have been reduced, and pressure to achieve has increased (e.g. Grey 2011 – 'The decline of play and the rise of psychopathology in children and adolescents').

In 2016, a working group was set up by Anne Dalziel, QIO, to pilot an approach which became known as 'Play to Learn' (P2L). 4 primary schools were selected to take part in a pilot (2016-2017), and it was predicted that by introducing an active play approach to learning, that all children would be better able to access the early level curriculum, that greater challenge could be introduced to the more able learners, and that the teacher would be able to give more uninterrupted time to the learners who required it.

A number of partners from within education supported the planning, delivery and evaluation of the pilot, including the Early Years Team, Educational Psychology Service and Education Scotland. The timeline for the pilot and its findings, led by the Practitioner Enquiry Group Early Years, is summarised below:

The pilot study highlighted that practitioners' understanding of child development and their understanding of the ways that different types of play (child led, adult led and adult initiated) can support children to develop skills across a number of curriculum areas underpinned the success of the Play to Learn approach. Please refer to the conference presentations on child development and research for further guidance on these areas, as they both contain links to additional reading materials and resources. For Play to Learn to succeed, the whole school community should receive the message that children's play is the most important activity in Primary 1.

### **Audit document**

This audit document is intended to support the process of practitioner enquiry (see document entitled 'Play to Learn: Collaborative practitioner enquiry 2017'), in terms of:

- a consultation framework for schools to use to self-evaluate as a baseline
- as a framework of targets for change
- and as a framework to measure change in terms of the outcome and impact of any changes if revisited post intervention.

This audit document can facilitate ongoing dialogue between Primary 1 teachers and SMT as well as with the wider school team, Pupil Support Group, Parent Council and Education management. This document can help schools to identify and prioritise areas for development and can support with collaborative practitioner enquiry Step 1, Step 2, Step 3 and Step 4:

**Step 1:** identify an issue or area for change – you can use the audit checklists to identify which area(s) of practice require development (use columns titled ‘extent to which this is already happening’ and ‘level of priority’ to rate current practice) – the priorities can be recorded in the ‘summary of priorities’ table (Page 16). Gather baseline data.

**Step 2:** identify possible solutions – you can use the audit checklists to identify ideas and strategies and following them up with additional reading

**Step 3:** introduce new practice or change – using the audit as record of changes made (use columns titled ‘action/next step’ and ‘evaluation/evidence’)

**Step 4:** evaluate what worked – using the audit checklists as a ‘post’ measure of change by re-evaluating the ‘extent to which this is happening’ and using the evidence recorded, which can be used to triangulate other forms of evidence (See Collaborative Practitioner Enquiry: Play to Learn page 11).





The audit has been divided into 7 main areas which focus on:

Child-led play

Adult-led learning

Adult-initiated learning

Outdoor learning

Classroom environment

Materials and resources

Reflection and evaluation: teachers, children and parents

### **Rating the indicators**

For each of the indicators selected, the Primary 1 teacher(s) and SMT, can evaluate the extent to which this area of practice is currently in place within the school setting using the following headings:

**Not yet developed**

**Developing**

**Established**

**Enhanced**

### **Definitions of these headings**

**Not yet developed:** Work would need to be done to consider how to develop practice in this area.

**Developing:** Work has started on this area of practice

**Established:** This is established in some areas and is now being spread across the whole setting.

**Enhanced:** Work is well established across the whole setting and being shared with other schools/settings.

N.B. The term 'you' in each indicator description refers to the collective 'you' of the Primary 1 teacher(s) and the SMT. If there is more than one Primary 1 class each teacher may wish to complete this audit with SMT separately.



## Area 1: Child-led play

	Description	Extent to which this is currently developed (Not yet developed, developing, established, enhanced)	Level of priority (high, medium, low)	Action/next step	Evaluation/evidence
1	Free play is viewed as an integral part of the school day and not just something that happens once the children have 'finished their work' or only at 'Golden Time'				
2	The adults support the play (e.g. 'uplevelling' the play through open questions and helping the children make links between their learning) but do not direct it e.g. step into conversations and play situations to ask a probing question, such as: <b>What would happen if...</b> and then know the moment to stand back to allow children to find out for themselves.				
3	Be aware of what children are doing to encourage deeper levels of engagement and help create other options through asking questions such as <b>I wonder if...</b> which in turn help children to work out their own theories.				



4	Children can choose to play in groups, pairs or alone				
5	There is a soft/active start to each day				
6	Free play is flexible throughout the week				
7	Children self-select play resources				
8	Children can structure their own play, playing with materials where and when and how they wish (within reason!)				
9	The adults provide emotional support when required				
10	Adults support the development of cooperative skills and problem solving skills through open ended questions and prompts				
11	The adults have confidence in the children's capacity and ability to self-direct their learning for some parts of the day				
12	The adults observe and record the children's play as evidence of attainment and achievement e.g. on post-it notes				
13	Adults appreciate the benefits of outdoor play (see Area 5: outdoor learning)				
14	Adults notice that children use skills previously learned in their play e.g. playing at 'schools', bingo, writing, reading, noticing numbers in the environment				



15	Adults notice that child-led play leads to very little 'lost time' e.g. resettling after break				
16	Adults are aware that some children will require support and 'scaffolding' to access all areas/resources in the learning environment				
17	Adults give children unspoken acknowledgement by smiling, nodding in approval to provide children with quiet unassuming support.				

**Area 2: Adult-led learning**

	Description	Extent to which this is currently developed (Not yet developed, developing, established, enhanced)	Level of priority (high, medium, low)	Action/next step	Evaluation/evidence
1	The teacher recognises that certain new and specific concepts and skills require direct teaching e.g. phonics, addition and subtraction, using calculators, place value, logging onto the computer, PE skills				
2	Technology is used to support adult-led learning e.g. interactive whiteboard, camera				
3	Adults give children many opportunities to express their learning verbally, in pictures, through ICT and in text (writing)				
4	Direct teaching time is flexible – if a child ‘gets’ the concept quickly then they can re-join the child-led play, allowing additional teacher time for the other children.				
5	Adult-led learning time can happen simultaneously (in parallel) with child-led play – teacher withdrawing more able learners to challenge their				



	learning or withdrawing learners who benefit from additional teacher time				
6	Adult-led learning can include the assessment of skills learned through the selective use of worksheets.				
7	Adult-led teaching often follows on from observing children's play				
8	Homework tasks can be a follow up to adult-led learning e.g. reading, word tin, number tasks, shared family activities including through the use of ICT				

**Area 3: Adult-initiated learning**

	Description	Extent to which this is currently developed (Not yet developed, developing, established, enhanced)	Level of priority (high, medium, low)	Action/next step	Evaluation/evidence
1	The teacher introduces a starting point, invitation, provocation, theme or stimulus to the play e.g. a dragon sends a letter to primary 1, the teachers needs the children to make her a new lunch box				
2	Adult initiated learning is a good opportunity to allow the adult to observe and make notes on what the children can manage independently within planned situations e.g. resources left out which link to taught concepts.				
3	Adult initiated learning can involve planned purposeful imaginative or exploratory play which focuses on the children and adults using their imaginations, being creative and exploring their environment.				
4	The teacher can select and introduce resources (e.g. toy, book, shell, flower) which capture interest to create moments which spark children's play.				



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5	The teacher is aware of what individual children's current interest may be and provides props and spaces both inside and outside where children can explore their interests through play.				
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**Area 4: Outdoor learning**

	Description	Extent to which this is currently developed (Not yet developed, developing, established, enhanced)	Level of priority (high, medium, low)	Action/next step	Evaluation/evidence
1	Children have regular access to an outdoor area (other than at playtime)				
2	The teacher brings the concepts of child-led play into the outdoors, with the adults looking to 'up level' the play through questions e.g. "I wonder if?" and "I wonder what would happen if.....?"				
3	Children can structure their own outdoor play, playing with open-ended materials where and when and how they wish (within reason!)				
4	The adults provide emotional support when required				
5	Adults support the development of cooperative skills and problem solving skills through open ended questions, feedback and prompts				
6	The adults have confidence in the children's capacity and ability to self-direct their learning				



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7	The adults observe and record the children's play as evidence of attainment and achievement e.g. on post-it notes				
8					

**Area 5: Classroom environment**

	Description	Extent to which this is currently developed (Not yet developed, developing, established, enhanced)	Level of priority (high, medium, low)	Action/next step	Evaluation/evidence
1	Language and communication friendly environment e.g. resources clearly labelled with pictures and words, interactive/meaningful wall displays				
2	Role play areas (e.g. post office, café, boat)				
3	Classroom 'zones'/clearly defined areas e.g. technology (construction), literacy area, numeracy, music, art				
4	Consider whether every child needs to have a table and chair all of the time				
5	Access to quiet or calmer area of the room (cushions, soft furnishings, no wall displays)				
6	Access to areas outwith the defined classroom if possible				
7	The children can move freely (free-flow play) between 'zones' during free play				
8					
9					

**Area 6: Materials and resources**

	Description	Extent to which this is currently developed (Not yet developed, developing, established, enhanced)	Level of priority (high, medium, low)	Action/next step	Evaluation/evidence
1	Resources are available for children to self-select				
2	Some of the free play resources are open ended – they do not determine or direct the experience or outcome of play e.g. paper and pens, cardboard boxes, cardboard tubes, wooden building blocks, bottle tops, plastic bottles and other 'loose parts' that can be donated from home				
3	Responsibility is given to the children to take care of their resources e.g. clean and tidy them at the end of the session				
4	Parents and families are encouraged to donate 'loose parts' through notes home, texts or email prompts				
5	Resources are arranged so that the children can see them and make choices for themselves.				



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6	The children have access to natural resources which help to stimulate all of the senses.				
7					

**Area 7: Reflection and evaluation: teachers, children and parents**

	Description	Extent to which this is currently developed (Not yet developed, developing, established, enhanced)	Level of priority (high, medium, low)	Action/next step	Evaluation/evidence
1	The views of parents and children are sought at various points in the year				
1	Teacher's plans reflect an overall balance between child led, adult initiated and adult led play over the week				
2	Teachers are clear about the children's targets for the day and for the week in literacy and numeracy (see examples of daily, weekly and termly planners from Bearsden Primary School)				
3	Child led learning is accounted for in the tracking of children's attainment and achievement through qualitative comments recorded and photos/videos taken during observations				
4	Children are given daily opportunities to reflect on their experiences, discovery and problem solving e.g. uploading pictures taken that day onto the whiteboard and watching them as				



	a group or class to discuss what they were doing and what they have learned				
5	The teacher makes adjustments to materials following changes in the children's interests and activities over time				
6	Teachers look for attainment and achievement within literacy, numeracy and wellbeing and also notice and record the development of higher order thinking skills e.g. reasoning, predicting, evaluating, modifying and inventing				
7	Teachers revisit the Collaborative Practitioner Enquiry document throughout the school year.				
8	Teachers are given the opportunity to develop their practice e.g. through visits to other schools, preparation time with stage partner colleagues/SMT, access to the Pupil Support Group forum or link Educational Psychologist				
9	Teachers ensure progress is measured in a range of areas: engagement, wellbeing as well as numeracy and literacy				



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10	Teacher observation of children's play is a major part of assessment and planning for adult-led and adult initiated learning tasks				
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### Summary of priorities

Area	Priority	Next steps	Timescale
Child-led play			
Adult-led learning			
Adult-initiated learning			
Outdoor learning			
Classroom environment			
Materials and resources			
Reflection and evaluation: teachers, children and parents			

It is recognised that there can be **challenges and barriers** to the Play to Learn approach. Common barriers cited include:

- A practitioner (Primary 1 teacher, SMT or both) being unconvinced that Play to Learn is a more effective method of raising attainment than their current practice
- The perspective that parents/carers prefer a more 'traditional' teaching approach
- The school practitioner's view that there are insufficient resources or budget for resources to fully embrace the Play to Learn approach
- The view that the classroom or school environment – or outdoor space - is not suitable for a Play to Learn approach
- Staff lacking confidence or perceived lacking in skill to implement the Play to Learn approach
- An SMT view that the school already has many other priorities in their improvement plan

It must be emphasised that small changes can make a significant difference to children's learning and wellbeing, and that the materials from the conference, including the examples of practice demonstrated by the pilot schools, will have given you some information about the evidence base for play and attainment in primary 1 and ways of sharing information with parents/carers.

**For additional support and advice please contact:**

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