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Implementing Play Pedagogy in the Early Years of School in Scotland: A Study of Teachers' and Children's Perspectives.

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Abstract

Research has confirmed the benefits of play in the early years. Recently, the importance of play pedagogy has been recognised in Scottish education. This research explores the implementation of play pedagogy in the early years of school in Scotland. Previous research of teachers' and children's perspectives of play is explored. This paper investigates the impact of learning theories on current play pedagogy policy and guidance in Scotland. The reality of implementing play pedagogy from a teacher's perspective is discussed. Children's perspectives of play in the early year's classroom are also examined.

Secondary analysis of predominantly qualitative primary data was undertaken. Thirty-nine studies in total were identified. Findings reveal the reality of implementing play pedagogy from a teacher's perspective. Barriers exist which can impede its practice, such as: accountability and assessment, role of the teacher and environmental barriers. These barriers also hinder outdoor play.

Research also discovered that children of a young age have clear ideas about play and not play. Play is regarded in opposition to work. Children use cues to categorise play and work, including: choice and control, teacher presence, activity and material, positive affect and space and constraint. Perspectives of play, work and learning are related. Implications from teachers' and children's perspectives studies are discussed. Pedagogical recommendations for early year's teachers are also put forth.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Introduction

 This is an extended literature review which focuses on the implementation of play pedagogy in the early years of school in Scotland. This chapter will begin by providing an overview of the research topic. The research aim and rationale will then be presented. Following this, the research questions will be put forth. Lastly, the limits of this research will be made clear.

All children have an inherent desire to play (Whitebread *et al,* 2017). The United Nations (UN) upholds the right to play for every child (United Nations, 1989). The right to play features heavily in the majority of early year's education policies across the world (McIness *et al,* 2011).

A wealth of research has confirmed the developmental and academic advantages of play in the early years (Mayer, 2004; Prince, 2004; Samuelsson and Carlsson, 2008; Whitebread, 2012; Whitebread *et al,* 2017). Effective early year's education, with a focus on play, promotes future success (Bloem, 2018; McMunn *et al,* 2012; Sylva *et al,* 2004). As a result, 'play pedagogy' has been a prime focus amongst educators in recent years (Baines and Blatchford, 2011; Moyles, 2014; Murray, 2018).

Play pedagogy describes a "balance between adult-directed, adult-initiated and child-directed learning experiences" (Education Scotland, 2020a:49). Adult-directed learning describes experiences which have been planned and led by the adult. This would describe traditional 'teaching' of skills-based subjects with an intended learning outcome (Fisher, 2013; Sylva *et al,* 2004).).

Adult-initiated learning is activities which adults have set up for children to explore independently (Fisher, 2013). They are open-ended and have a potential learning outcome (ibid). However, children may direct the learning in an unforeseen way. Child-directed learning is activities that children plan

and lead themselves. They are in charge of experience, time and resources (Fisher, 2007). In early year's classrooms, these experiences typically occur through 'free play' (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009).

The importance of play pedagogy in the early years of school is being recognised in Scottish education. The Scottish Government has recently released policy and guidance on its implementation (Education Scotland, 2019; 2020a; Scottish Executive, 2010; Scottish Government, 2013). These documents are largely influenced by significant child learning theories and will be discussed in more detail later in this review.

Scottish early year's children learn through the 'Early Level' of the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) (Scottish Executive, 2004). The Early level for most children spans from pre-school to end of Primary 1 (approximately three to six years old). For the purposes of this review, the term 'early years of school' refers to Primary 1.

The aim of this research is to discuss the implementation of play pedagogy in the early years of school in Scotland. It explores existing literature on teachers' and children's perspectives of play. The rationale for this research is threefold. First, an 'implementation gap' can exist in education (Harvey and Kamvounias, 2008, Newton, 2010). This refers to the distance between goals stated (in policy or guidance) and the reality of implementing them (Bamber, 2009; Newton, 2003). As previously stated, play pedagogy policy and guidance has recently emerged in Scotland. The reality of implementing play pedagogy from a teacher's perspective warrants further research.

Second, the author herself is a Scottish early year's teacher currently working in a school which advocates play pedagogy. Undertaking this research will therefore develop the author's professional practice. It is hoped that this research will also enhance the practice of other teachers who are interested in implementing play pedagogy.

Third, children's perspectives of play can help to inform pedagogical practice (Larsen, 2015; Whitebread *et al,* 2012). Children have been increasingly given

a voice in research (Christensen and James, 2008).   The current research therefore adds to the growing literature of children's perspective studies (Alderson, 2008; Birbeck, and Drummond, 2007; Christensen and James, 2008).

There are three research questions which guide this research:

1) What has been the influence of learning theories on the current play pedagogy policy and guidance in Scotland?

2) What is the reality of implementing play pedagogy from a teacher's perspective?

3) What are children's perspectives of play in the early year's classroom?

This extended literature review will begin by outlining the methodological approach used to explore the teachers' and children's perspectives literature (Chapter 2). Following this, the impact of learning theories on current play pedagogy policy and guidance in Scotland will be examined (Chapter 3). Next, the reality of implementing play pedagogy from a teacher's perspective will be put forth (Chapter 4). Children's perspectives of play in the early year's classroom will then be analysed (Chapter 5). Lastly, the discussion chapter (Chapter 6) will synthesise key findings and consider their implications. Future recommendations (including further research possibilities) will also be stated.

1.2. Limits of the Research

This study seeks to examine the implementation of play pedagogy in the early years of school in Scotland. As such, it will only discuss Scottish play pedagogy policy and guidance. This directly relates to the author's personal experiences as a Scottish early year's teacher.

As mentioned earlier, this paper explores previous research of teachers' and children's perspectives. Previous research will include relevant studies from other contexts and geographical locations. The implications of this previous research on the Scottish situation will be examined. The selected studies included in the analyses will be stated in the subsequent chapter.

1.3. Summary

In summary, research has confirmed the benefits of play in the early years. Recently, the importance of play pedagogy has been recognised in Scottish education. The research aim and rationale for the current research was put forth. The three research questions guiding this review were stated and the structure of this review was outlined. The limits of the research were then made clear to the reader. The following chapter will now detail the methodological approach used to gather the teachers' and children's perspectives literature.

2. Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1. Introduction

The previous chapter provided an overview of play pedagogy and a rationale for the current research. This chapter will outline the methodological approach that was used to obtain the teachers' and children's perspectives studies. This paper is an extended literature review. It therefore provides an in-depth, detailed and comprehensive synthesis of current published literature on a specific subject area (Ferrari, 2015). It represents a portrayal of some of the most significant themes which have been revealed within the research. Secondary analysis of primary research was undertaken. Data was predominantly qualitative in nature.

It is acknowledged that systematic reviews are more rigorous regarding their methodological approaches (ibid). They can be replicated and can therefore reduce reviewer bias (Bryman, 2012; Schlesselman and Collins, 2003). However, carrying out a systematic review necessitates a significant amount of time and resources. This is beyond the author's capabilities as a novice researcher and full-time teacher carrying out a Masters dissertation.

Consequently, this paper will incorporate elements of a systematic review to strengthen findings and increase transparency for the reader (Murphy, 2012). This will include an inclusion and exclusion criteria and literature search strategy with reference to key terms.

First, the author's ontological, epistemological and methodological positions will be stated. The strengths and limitations of the chosen methodological approach will also be considered. Next, the inclusion and exclusion criteria will be presented. Following this, the literature search strategy and key search terms will be put forth. The selected studies for the current research (including a discussion of their research methods) will then be stated. The

emerging themes from the literature will then be put forth. Lastly, ethical considerations will be discussed.

2.2. Ontological, Epistemological and Methodological Positions

A researcher must be able to describe their beliefs and assumptions of reality and thinking as to how knowledge is created (Abdul- Rehman and Altharti, 2016). These perspectives have important implications for research design and are known as research paradigms. Kuhn (1962: 3) describes research paradigms as "the set of common beliefs and agreements shared between scientists about how problems should be understood and addressed". Research paradigms can be distinguished through their ontology (perspective of reality), epistemology (theory of knowledge) and methodology (strategies to gather information) (Guba, 1994).

Ontology describes the nature of social entities (Bryman, 2001). There are two key ontological positions within social research: positivism and interpretivism (ibid). A positivist perspective is the belief that there is one truth or reality that can be tested empirically (Cohen *et al,* 2013). This paradigm offers an objective view of reality and as such is less prone to bias (Curtis *et al,* 2013). However, the impact of human experience and subjective interpretation is overlooked (Caldwell, 2015).

Interpretivism involves researchers interpreting elements of a study as opposed to empirically testing a research hypothesis (Myers, 2008). Interpretivists assert that there are multiple interpretations of reality. Individuals are social actors who construct their own versions of truth based on their environment (ibid).

The author takes an interpretative ontological stance. It is based on the ontological view that every teacher and child has a unique perspective of reality. The author accepts that the environment of each individual will impact their understanding of play.

The interpretive approach dictates that all knowledge is subjective (Curtis *et al,* 2013). The author's epistemological position is that conducting secondary research of qualitative data will garner a generalised overview of commonalities and themes as opposed to one single agreed vision of reality.

2.2.1. Methodological Approach: Strengths and Limitations

A researcher can choose to carry out primary (gathering original research) or secondary (use of existing data) research (Curtis *et al*, 2013). The author chose to conduct secondary analysis of primarily qualitative data. There are both strengths and limitations of this methodological approach.

As established in the previous chapter, there is an abundance of previous literature on the topic of play. Conducting secondary research was beneficial in order to synthesise the existing data and provide a cohesive account of perspectives of play for the reader (Bryman, 2012; Heaton, 2004). Studies of play pedagogy in a Scottish context are lacking. Secondary research allows new conclusions to be generated (Bryman, 2012). As such, this review adds to the literature of play pedagogy from a Scottish perspective.

However, secondary research relies on accessing articles which may be unrelated to the research at hand (Smith, 2008). Alternatively, primary research can be designed and conducted to satisfy the specific needs of the research (Curtis *et al*, 2013). However, secondary research is less time-consuming than primary research, by using data that is already available online (Goodwin, 2012; Hox and Boeije, 2005). This better meets the author's needs as a student and full-time teacher. Nonetheless, conducting an extended literature review is an exhaustive and complex process (Goodwin, 2012). Meticulous scrutiny of secondary data is not devoid of time and effort.

Positivism has a deductive and scientific view of the world (Rovai *et al,* 2014). As such it lends itself to quantitative research methods (ibid). An interpretive stance lends itself to the use of qualitative research methods as it seeks to find hidden meanings (Saunders *et al,* 2007). An initial search of the field

revealed that the majority of previous researchers on the subject also took an interpretative position. The majority of studies in the analyses were therefore qualitative in nature, with the exception of five mixed-methods studies (Hunter and Walsh, 2014; Gray and Ryan, 2016; McClintic and Petty, 2015; Nicolson, 2019; Ring *et al*, 2016).

Qualitative research allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of participant's perspectives and feelings (Silverman, 2016). However, qualitative research is difficult to replicate as people's perspectives are an abstract concept (Galdas, 2017; Noble and Smith, 2015). On the other hand, quantitative research uses measurable methods to quantify data (Llewellyn *et al*, 1999). This reduces subjectivity and allows for replication. However, it is difficult to capture perspectives and feelings using solely numerical data (Curtis *et al*, 2013).

The author acknowledges that there is a heightened risk of bias when conducting secondary analysis of qualitative data, particularly when taking an interpretative stance (Clark and Cosette, 2016). Qualitative data is based on the subjective interpretation of researchers. Personal values and beliefs will have undoubtedly impacted their analysis (Ratner, 2002). As a student and early year's teacher, the author's disposition relates directly to the research focus. This disposition will shape the analyses of the data presented later in this review (McNair, 2015).

A mixed- methods research approach describes the use of both qualitative and quantitative research methods (Almaki, 2016). The inclusion of mixed-methods in the current review helps to compensate for methodological weaknesses of both data collection methods (Almaki, 2016; Green, 2007). Findings can be corroborated which helps to reduce potential biases (Creswell *et al*, 2011).

2.3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied in order to set the boundaries for the initial literature search (Bryman, 2012). First, the studies employed had to be written in English. Second, only primary research articles were to be included in the analyses. Third, studies were to be peer reviewed journal articles. However, this criterion was later expanded following the initial search to include two large-scale research reports (Ring et *al*, 2016; Sanders *et al*, 2005). Both of which are not peer reviewed. Fourth, teachers' perspectives studies were to be conducted within the last ten years (2010-2020). This was to ensure relevance to current play pedagogy policy and practice. This date range was expanded for children's perspectives studies, as research from the last ten years proved unfruitful. The author recognizes that recent studies would be more representative of the current situation.

Fifth, research was limited to Western countries. This allowed for a better comparison to a Scottish context. By excluding studies out-with Western countries, the possibility to draw interesting comparisons is limited. This could be a potential avenue for future research. This criterion was later expanded for children's perspectives studies. This allowed for two articles to be included in the review: one including Turkish children (Kahyaoğlu, 2014) and another which compared German and Chinese children (Wu, 2014). Both of which were deemed useful in contributing to discussions.

Lastly, studies utilizing early year's teachers and children were to be included. As discussed previously, this paper defines early years as age three to six. In Scotland, this would cover children from Nursery to those at the end of their first year in school (Primary 1). The author accepts that perspectives of school teachers and children of school-age (age four to five) would be more relevant to the research aim.

2.4. Literature Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted between March 2020 and April 2020. The search terms employed for gathering teachers' perspectives were: 'teacher' AND 'perspectives' OR 'views' AND 'play' OR 'play pedagogy'. For children's perspectives, terms were: 'children' AND 'perspectives' OR 'views' AND 'play' OR 'play pedagogy'. It was thought that using 'perspectives' or 'views' and 'play' or 'play pedagogy' would result in a broader range of studies related to the topic of interest.

An initial search was conducted on web search engine Google Scholar. The search for teachers' perspectives using the key search terms stated above amassed over 111, 000 results. The search terms were re-ordered in an attempt to reduce this sizeable dataset. When the terms 'perspectives' OR 'views' were put first, it totaled 79,600. This was considered a more manageable bank of data to search through. Children's perspectives produced over 76,500 results. There was no significant difference after re-ordering the search terms (75, 700).

It is advisable to consult a variety of databases when completing a search strategy (Ferrari, 2015). However, it was deemed that the initial search of Google Scholar provided a sufficient amount of literature from a wide range of databases to be explored. Further references were pursued within reference sections of articles retrieved (Bryman, 2012). This process was replicated until no new relevant articles were unearthed and a 'saturation point' was reached (Ferrari, 2015; Randolph, 2009).

Each article was assessed to determine whether it met the selection criteria. The introduction and summary sections of each article were also read to determine their relevance for inclusion in the research. Articles that were considered unrelated to the research topic were omitted.

2.5. Findings

A total of 39 articles were identified in total (21 for teachers' perspectives and 18 children's perspectives). One study overlapped both teachers' and children's perspectives and was therefore included in both data sets (McInnes *et al*, 2011). In essence, the selected studies were believed to satisfy the research questions.

Selected studies took place in a variety of countries. The types of setting teachers and children attended were diverse. This included nurseries, pre-schools, kindergartens and primary schools. They took place in England (11), Australia (8), Wales (4), Canada (4), United States of America (3), Iceland (2), Republic of Ireland (2), Germany and China (1), Northern Ireland (1), Scotland (1) and Turkey, (1). Studies were mostly small-scale explorative studies with the exception of two large-scale research reports (for an overview of studies and locations, see Appendix 1).

2.5.1. Selected Studies: Teachers' Perspectives

Sixteen small scale qualitative studies were included in the research: one using participants action research (Fisher, 2011), four using interviews (Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes, 2017; Little, 2010; Nolan and Patsch, 2018; Robert-Homes, 2012) and 11 utilising interviews and observations (Davies and Hamilton, 2018; Devi *et al*, 2018; 2020; Fleer, 2015; Martlew *et al*, 2011; McInnes *et al*, 2011; Pyle and Bigelow, 2015; Pyle and Danniels, 2017; Pyle *et al*, 2018; Robert-Holmes, 2015; Waite, 2010). The author recognises that studies using multiple methods are more reliable than single method studies as findings can be corroborated (Davis *et al*, 2011).

Five studies adopted a mixed methods approach. Two small-scale (McClintic and Petty, 2015; Nicolson, 2019) and one large scale study (Ring *et al*, 2016) utilised questionnaires and interviews. Hunter and Walsh (2014) used questionnaires and observations. Gray and Ryan (2016) opted for all three of

these data collection methods. As previously stated, it is difficult to gather in-depth perspectives using questionnaires due to their quantitative nature (Patten, 2016). However, questionnaires are able to reach a larger sample of the population (Phellas *et al*, 2011). This helps to supplement a small sample of qualitative findings and increase the rigour of results (ibid).

2.5.2. Selected Studies: Children's Perspectives

Nine small-scale qualitative studies were included in the research: two using interviews (Keating *et al*, 2000; Robson, 1993), one using observations (Wainwright *et al* 2020) and four which used both interviews and observations (King, 1979; Pyle and Alaca, 2018; Wing, 1995; Wu, 2014). Two studies took an ethnographic research approach and also used interviews and observations to gather perspectives (Breathnach *et al*, 2017; Theobald *et al*, 2015). One large- scale research report utilising interviews was also included (Sanders *et al*, 2005).

As stated in the previous chapter, children are being increasingly included in research (Christensen and James, 2008). To do so, researchers are adopting 'child-friendly' research methods (Alderson, 2008; Birbeck *et al*, 2007). Two small-scale Icelandic based studies by the same researcher (Einarsdottir 2005; 2010) used what is known as the 'Mosaic Approach' developed by Clark and Moss (2011). This approach involves the use of traditional data collection methods alongside child-friendly participatory methods. Both studies used children's interviews, drawings and photographs to obtain perspectives of play.

Fisher (2009) created a questionnaire which asked children in England to draw a picture of their perspectives of transitioning from Reception to Year One. Space was left for adults to add further detail on what children discussed. The author acknowledges that using drawings to obtain children's views is more age-appropriate for early year's pupils.

Three large-scale (Howard, 2002; Howard *et al*, 2006; McInnes, 2019) and two small-scale studies (Kahyaoğlu, 2014; McInnes *et al*, 2011) in the analysis

adopted a quantitative research method developed by Howard (2002) known as the Activity Apperspective Story Procedure (hereafter 'AASP'). The AASP is a 'game-like' experimental procedure that involves children sorting pictures depicting classroom activities into play/work and learning/not learning (Howard, 2002). It then asks children to justify their decisions (ibid). Its game-like procedure is said to contribute to its child-friendly research approach (Howard and McInnes, 2013)

As previously discussed, quantitative methods are not generally regarded as an appropriate method to gather perspectives. However, using pictures to obtain perspectives can be helpful for young children with limited language capabilities (Epstein *et al*, 2006).

Studies included in the analysis covered a broad range of time (1979-2020). Despite implementation of new policy and guidance, children's perspectives of play remained relatively consistent.

2.6. Emerging Themes

Thematic analysis was used to identify key patterns or themes when exploring the literature (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Four themes emerged in relation to teachers' perspectives of play. These were: accountability and assessment, role of the teacher in influencing play, environmental barriers and outdoor learning. There were two themes which emerged in the children's perspectives literature: play versus work and play and learning.

2.7. Ethics

As a University of Glasgow student, ethical approval must be granted from the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee before conducting research. As per University guidelines, this paper utilises open secondary data which is available freely on the internet. It therefore does not require ethical approval from the Committee. Even so, ethical considerations are to be discussed.

The author is aware that the original data used in the analysis was not conducted to fulfil the research aim of this paper. As such, the data will represented accurately and all work will be referenced.

The majority of selected studies included in this review were peer approved academic articles. Their inclusion in such publication has been assessed for quality (Green *et al*, 2006) and has met rigorous ethical standards in their primary research (Halej, 2017). This is particularly relevant for research involving children which must prioritise ethical considerations (Curtis *et al*, 2013). The children's perspectives studies have therefore satisfied ethical standards for research involving children and have addressed issues of obtaining informed consent (Gallagher *et al*, 2010).

Two large-scale research reports were utilised in the research that were not peer reviewed (Ring *et al*, 2016; Sanders *et al*, 2005). Both were checked by the author to ensure they had been granted ethical clearance. This ensured their suitability for inclusion in the current research.

The author is aware that studies utilising the AASP with young children can raise ethical concerns due to their experimental nature (Neill, 2005). However, it is acknowledged that its child-friendly approach allowed the needs of the research to be satisfied in an age-appropriate manner (O'Reilly *et al*, 2013).

2.8. Summary

This chapter outlined the methodological approach that was used to explore the literature of teachers' and children's perspectives. The author took an interpretative stance when conducting the research. The methodological approach chosen afforded both advantages and disadvantages.

Parameters for the literature search were set for teachers' perspectives studies through six inclusion and exclusion criteria. They had to be: written in English, primary research articles, peer reviewed journals (although this was later expanded following the initial search), conducted within the past

decade (2010-2020), take place in Western countries and include early year's teachers and children.

For children's perspectives, certain criteria were expanded to garner more findings. No date range was specified and studies could take place in any geographical location. A literature search with key search terms was conducted on web search engine Google scholar. A total of 39 studies were selected for the analyses (21 for teachers' perspectives and 18 for children's perspectives).

There were four emerging themes within the teachers' perspectives studies (accountability and assessment, role of the teacher in influencing play, environmental barriers and outdoor learning) and two themes for children's perspectives (play versus work and play and learning). Lastly, ethical considerations were put forth. The following chapter will detail the child learning theories which underpin play pedagogy. The influence of these theories on current Scottish policy and guidance of play pedagogy will also be examined.

Chapter 3: Child Learning Theories and Their Influence on Current Policy and Guidance of Play pedagogy in Scotland

3.1. Introduction

The methodological approach which was used to explore the teachers' and children's perspectives literature was put forth in the previous chapter. The aim of this chapter is to examine the influence of child learning theories on current policy and guidance of play pedagogy in Scotland. Before embarking on discussions of policy and guidance, it would be appropriate to discuss definitions of play and the theories which underpin play pedagogy.

Play is a broad and complex phenomenon which makes it hard to define (Larsen, 2015; Whitebread *et al*, 2012). There appears to be an agreement on several criteria of play (White, 2012). The UN defines play as "any behaviour, structure or process initiated, controlled and structured by children" (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2013: 3). Others have described play as an activity which is fun, actively engaging, spontaneous, creative and has no goal or outcome (Ashiabi, 2007; Miller and Almon 2009; Sturgess, 2003).

Categories of play may include physical, constructive, language, or symbolic play (Miller and Almon, 2009). Physical play describes activities which allow children's gross and fine motor skills to progress by using bodily movements (Whitebread, 2012). Constructive play involves experimenting with and manipulating components of the play environment to create or 'construct' something new (Nath and Szucs 2017). Language play is the use the different forms and functions of language for fun and pleasure (Crystal, 1996). Perhaps the most researched type of play is symbolic play (Bretherton, 2014). This describes using objects, actions or ideas to symbolise something else (Hughes, 2009).

Insight into the minds of children, particularly in relation to play, relies on the use of child learning theories (Pellegrini, 2009). They provide the basis of our understanding and help to explain play behaviour. Despite the various meanings of play, theorists in this field have yet to come to an agreed definition (Ertmer and Newby, 2013). There are three paradigms which dominate the literature: cognitivism, constructivism and behaviourism (ibid).

Cognitivism encompasses a vast range of significant and influential theories (for instance see Gagné, 1974 and Miller, 1956). Play was an integral part of Piaget's (1962) Stages of Cognitive Development theory, and is the most referred to within cognitive research (Ertmer and Newby, 2013). As such, it will be the focus of this paper.

The two major constructivism theories- cognitive (Piaget, 1952; 1983) and social (Vygotsky, 1978) constructivism will also be examined in this chapter. Both of which have significantly advanced our understanding of play and have informed good practice in the early years (Stephen, 2012).

Bandura's (1977) cognitive behaviourism theory has been chosen for analysis. This is due to its emphasis on social learning, which is of relevance to play pedagogy. However, the principles of behaviourism are now considered outdated (Abramson, 2014; Heylighen, 2008). Cognitivism and constructivism have since replaced behaviourist thinking (Ertmer and Newby, 2013). As this chapter will later reveal, these paradigms have been highly influential on play pedagogy policy and guidance in Scotland.

The three major paradigms (cognitivism, constructivism and behaviourism) and their associated child learning theories will now be discussed and critiqued in turn. Following this, current play pedagogy policy and guidance in Scotland will be put forth. The influence of child learning theories on these documents will also be discussed. Finally, a brief description of the initial search of teachers' and children's perspectives literature will be stated.

3.2. Learning Theories

3.2.1. Cognitivism

Cognitivism is concerned with how we think. Specifically, it looks to explain how we acquire, store and process information (McLeod, 2003). It stresses the important role of internal processes (such as cognition, problem solving, language and memory) when explaining learning and behaviour (Snelbecker, 1983; Nagowah and Nagowah, 2009).

3.2.1.1. Piaget's (1962) Cognitive Theory

Piaget's (1962) highly influential Stages of Cognitive Development theory aims to explain how a child's thinking develops as they age. Piaget (1962) established that children progress through four discrete stages of development: sensorimotor —birth to two years; preoperational—two to seven years; concrete operational—seven to eleven years and formal operational—eleven years and beyond. He believed that the order of the stages is fixed and children cannot miss any stages out (Huit and Hummel, 2003). However, Piaget accepted that the age children reach each stage may vary depending on the child (Moreno, 2010).

Piaget affirmed that children engage in and display types of play which mirrors their stage of cognitive development: functional play, constructive play, symbolic play and games with rules (Johnson *et al*, 2013; Pelligrini and Smith, 2005). Just as Piaget's developmental stages were progressive, so too were these forms of play- starting with functional play and progressing to games with rules (Johnson *et al*, 2013; Sutton-Smith, 1983).

Functional play describes any repetitive movements and primarily focuses on use of the senses (Zelazo and Kearsley, 1980). Piaget observed this type of play in the sensorimotor stage (Moreno, 2010). It could include the use of rattles or throwing objects (ibid). As stated previously, constructive play

describes manipulating materials to make something else (such as using play-dough or Lego). Symbolic play involves engaging in imaginary situations to play the role of another (Hughes, 2008). For Piaget, it is within the pre-operational stage that constructive and symbolic play occurs (Johnson *et al*, 2013). In the concrete operational stage, children engage in games with rules. This involves playing competitive and rule based co-operative games (Pellegrini, 1998) often associated with primary school (such as dodegball or tig).

3.2.1.2. Piaget's Cognitive Theory: Strengths and Limitations

MacNaughton (2005: 5) explained that Piaget's (1962) stage theory "has settled so firmly into the fabric of early childhood studies that it's familiarly makes it just seem right, best and ethical". The impact of his theory is evident across nurseries and schools worldwide. Children are grouped according to age and stage of development (Stephen and Brown, 2004). In Scotland, many early years practitioners are asked to complete 'Developmental Milestones' for children in their care (McNair, 2017). This describes a checklist of behaviours or physical skills which children are 'expected' to display by a certain age.

Education systems around the world have used his theory to inform effective pedagogy (Hammond, 2014). His theory helped to start what is known as 'Developmentally Appropriate Practice' (DAP). This refers to educational practice which aligns with child's physical and cognitive development and supports their social and emotional well-being. Many countries across the world consider play pedagogy an essential component of DAP (Bertram and Pascal, 2002; Walsh *et al*, 2010).

However, research has concluded that children can possess cognitive abilities at an earlier age than Piaget believed (Bower, 1982; Flavell, 1982). As such, linear stages of development have been discounted as an unreliable account of how children learn (Donaldson, 1978; German and Baillargeon, 1983; Halford, 1989; Siegal, 1991).

Piaget utilised his own children and children from privileged backgrounds to formulate his cognitive theory (Hopkins, 2011). Arguably, this is an unrepresentative sample and is not reflective of wider society (Brown and Desforges, 2006). Additionally, his theory only seeks to explain learning in 'typically developing' children (James, 2011). This may exclude children with additional support needs. Therefore, it may not offer a reliable and widely applicable account of children's learning.

3.2.2. Constructivism

Constructivism describes learning as a result of mental constructions (Gray and MacBlain, 2015). Elliot *et al* (2000: 256) describe it as an "approach to learning that holds that people actively construct or make their own knowledge and that reality is determined by the experiences of the learner". The theory explains that new knowledge is constructed by building on previous learning (Phillips, 1995). It is an active rather than passive process (Sharma and Bansal, 2017). Children learn through being actively engaged and involved in the world around them (Bada and Olusegun, 2015).

3.2.2.1. Piaget's (1952; 1983) Cognitive Constructivism Theory

Piaget believed that active engagement with the environment advances children's knowledge (Omrod, 2008). Piaget's (1952; 1983) constructivism theory introduced the term 'schema'- describing both a type of knowledge and the process of acquiring it. He believed that children are continually adjusting to their environment; learning through a constant process of acquiring new information and furthering their own learning. As information is gained, new schemas are created and old schemas are transformed or modified.

Piaget (1952; 1983) established three concepts that describe this process of learning known as assimilation, accommodation and equilibration. Assimilation is when the child acquires new knowledge from the environment which tests their current thinking. Encountering this new information causes

a mental disequilibrium. Accommodation is adapting this newly acquired information to fit with what they have already leaned (or schemas) (Wadsworth, 2004). This process of accommodation leads to 'cognitive equilibrium' (Omrod, 2008).

According to Piaget, meaningful learning takes places when a child finds out things for themselves and creates their own hypotheses (Mayer, 2004). This idea has been further developed by subsequent researchers and is now commonly known as 'discovery learning' (Perkins, 1991). This method of teaching encourages children to initiate their own learning and engage in experiences which challenge their thinking (Khlar and Nigam, 2004; Mayer, 2004).

3.2.2.2. Cognitive Constructivism: Strengths and Weaknesses

Piaget's (1952; 1983) theory relates directly to child-directed learning, a key component of play pedagogy. As discussed in Chapter 1, child-directed learning describes self-exploration through child-led play (Fisher, 2007). Children are intrinsically motivated to problem solve (Karagiorgi and Symeu, 2005; Whitebread, *et al*, 2017). Good practice in the early years dictates that children must have opportunities to play and explore their environment independently to enhance their learning (Broadhead and Burt, 2012; Powell and Kalina, 2009; Whitebread *et al,* 2017). It has been found that children are more engaged in their learning when given more independence (Cordova and Lepper, 1996; Mozgalina, 2015).

However, his theory overlooks the important social context of learning (Alfieri *et al*, 2011; Tobias and Duffy, 2009). There are concepts which may be too difficult for children to learn on their own. When children attend school there is an expectation to attain specific skills in order to progress. If children are left to their own devices, this may not be achieved. Piaget's (1952; 1983) theory alone may be a selective account of how children learn.

3.2.2.3. Vygotksy's (1978) Social Constructivism Theory

In contrast to Piaget, Vygotsky (1978) believed in the value of social learning. He established that children learn from 'more knowledgeable others' (hereafter 'MKO's') in their environment, including adults and peers (Cossaro, 1992). MKO's support children through what is known as their 'Zone of Proximal Development' (Vygotsky, 1978). This refers to skills a child is close to acquiring but needs support to attain them.

Vygotsky believed play allows a child to "jump above the level of his normal behaviour" (Vygotsky, 1967: 16). He largely studied play in pre-school children and limited his definition of play to symbolic or pretend play (Karpov, 2003). Vygotksy argued that features of symbolic play (such as imaginative thinking and acting out different roles) advance children's cognitive, social, and emotional development (Bodrova and Leong, 2015; Scharer, 2017). As outlined earlier, this differed to Piaget (1962) who observed multiple play types across a wider age span of children.

Piaget (1962) believed children's play developed as they aged. Alternatively, Vygotsky's (1978) theory has been later used to emphasise the role of MKO's (particularly the role of the adult) in developing play (Karprov, 2003; Elkonin, 2005). Specifically, his theory explains that children reach higher levels of thinking during play when an adult sensitively intervenes (Scharer, 2017).

3.2.2.4. Social Constructivism: Strengths and Limitations

Much research supports that MKO's play an important role in advancing learning through play. Although play can be a solitary activity, it is often a time where children interact with their peers and form friendships (Howard *et al,* 2006). Social interaction through play has been found to enhance children's cognitive abilities and increase positive future outcomes (Brendgen

et al, 2005; Estell et al, 2008). In a review of the literature, Rao et al (2007) found that social interaction enhances children's language skills and play behaviour.

A key study which supports the role of adults in play is a large scale longitudinal study by Sylva et al (2004), known as the Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE) project. It examined 3000 children between the ages of three and seven to investigate the long-term impact of pre-school education. It was concluded that high quality interaction between children and adults during play, dubbed "sustained shared thinking" (both parties participating and adding to the thinking to develop and extend the understanding) (ibid: 1) improved children's cognitive development.

The teaching method 'scaffolding' has stemmed from Vygotsky's (1978) theory (Wood et al, 1976). This describes the support given to pupils from adults or higher-ability peers to help improve attainment. Research has established the cognitive benefits of scaffolding amongst children (Littleton and Mercer, 2010; Muhonen et al, 2016; Van de Pol et al, 2010; Whitebread, 2011).

However, Vygotsky's (1978) theory discounts the value of self-discovery. It does not explain instances where children gain personal understanding without the assistance of others (Lui and Matthews, 2005). There is a danger that too much emphasis is placed on teacher-led practices (Bodrova and Leong, 2015). In accordance with the EPPE project (Sylva et al, 2004); a careful balance must be struck between adult-led 'teaching' and child-directed learning.

3.2.3. Behaviourism

In behaviourism, learning is simply classified as process of stimulus- response. Individuals encounter external stimuli until a desired outcome (or behaviour) is displayed (Guney and Al, 2012). Behaviourists accept that "only observable, measurable, outward behaviour is worthy of scientific inquiry" (Bush, 2006:

14). Learning is primarily measured through changes in the environment (Chalmers and Hunt, 2013).

3.2.3.1 Bandura's (1977) Cognitive Behaviourism Theory

Bandura (1977) further developed the principles of behaviourism by emphasising the role of cognition and social learning. Like Vygotsky (1978), he too stressed the importance of social interaction. However, Bandura (1977) believed that children learn by observing and imitating 'models' in their environment (Belsky, 2013). These may include peers or teachers. The models act as exemplars of behaviour for the child. Children learn by observing rewards and punishments relating to behaviour. When a child observes a behaviour which is frequently rewarded, they are more likely to repeat it. If the behaviour is repeatedly punished, they are less likely to display that behaviour (Renzetti *et al,* 2013).

3.2.3.2. Cognitive Behaviourism: Strengths and Limitations

When children play with one another, they are naturally exposed to models in the environment (Herbert and Simcock, 2003; Nielsen and Dissanayake, 2004). Research has established that children copy the language and behaviour of those around them when playing together (Akhtar and Tomasello, 1998; Hanna and Meltzoff, 1993; Rakoczy*et al,* 2000). Through observational learning, their social and language skills are developed (Gest *et al,* 2001; Ladd, 2005).

Interestingly, this is particularly evident in the inclusion of autistic children in mainstream school. Playing successfully requires children to be adaptive (Couper *et al,* 2013). They must be able to instigate and respond to social interactions, share toys, take turns and adhere to simple rules without adult support (ibid). Social and communication deficits make play challenging for autistic children (Brown and Murray, 2001; Couper *et al,* 2013).

Harrower and Dunlap (2001) concluded that typically developing children can be effective models in the environment. They can provide exemplars of

adaptive behaviour, allowing autistic children to imitate and learn the underlying rules of social situations. In a review of the literature by Luckett *et al* (2007), it was concluded that mainstream schools often rely on cognitive behaviourism approaches when teaching autistic children how to play.

However, behaviourists believe that learning occurs as a result of environmental manipulations (Guney and Al, 2012). As such, Bandura (1977)'s theory suggests children are passive in the process of learning (Ahea, 2016). This may reflect a more teacher-centred pedagogy; one where teachers are in sole control of the environment. This is not reflective of current early years practice and play pedagogy (Chalmers and Hunt, 2013).

3.3. Current Policy and Guidance on Play in Scotland: The Influence of Child Learning Theories

3.3.1. Policy of Play Pedagogy: Scottish Early Year's Curriculum

Learning through play is embedded within the Early level of the Scottish CfE (Scottish Executive, 2004). The influence of Piaget (1952; 1983) and Vygotsky's (1978) constructivism theories are evident within the curriculum policy documents. The concept that children construct knowledge through actively engaging with their environment is a key feature of the CfE, known as 'active learning' (Scottish Executive, 2007).

In Building the Curriculum 2, active learning is described as an active and hands on learning experience which is "enriched and developed through play" (ibid: 8). Echoing Vygotsky's theory (1978), it states that adults should "support and extend" children's thinking through "sensitive intervention" during play (ibid: 5).

3.3.2. Scottish Play Pedagogy Guidance

The push for play in the Early Level of the CfE gave rise to the release of Scotland's first 'National Strategy for Play' in 2013 (Scottish Government,

2013). In line with the UN's definition (section 3.1.1), the guidance defines play as an activity which is:

> freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. It is performed with no external goal or reward. (Scottish Government, 2013: 10).

Education Scotland recently produced further guidance for practitioners, dubbed the 'Early Level Play Pedagogy Toolkit' (Education Scotland, 2019). For the first time, the term 'play pedagogy' was used in Scottish policy and guidance to describe effective practice in the early years.

A major document for early years educators has since been released: 'Realising the Ambition: Being Me' (hereafter 'RtA') (Education Scotland, 2020a). It states that teachers must adopt play pedagogy in Primary 1 in order to ensure a smooth transition from nursery to school. The influence of Piaget's (1962) cognitive theory is made clear:

> we can easily see developmental differences in how they explore and interact with the world around them…We know it is important for settings to offer children interactions, experiences and spaces that are developmentally appropriate. (Education Scotland, 2020a: 65).

Indoor and outdoor play environments are integrated for the first time. Practitioners are advised not to focus on "recreating indoor play areas outdoors", but instead "reflect upon the unique opportunities outdoor play affords" (ibid: 8). Practitioners are advised to encourage children to take risks to build resilience. They are challenged to overcome barriers associated with outdoor play, including lack of outdoor space and limited resources.

Adult-directed and adult-initiated learning experiences (two components of play pedagogy) are supported by Vygotsky's (1978) theory. Mirroring the CfE, the RtA states that that the role of the adult is to "deepen and extend" children's learning during play through "timely interventions" (Education

Scotland, 2020a: 49). Allowing opportunities for children to collaborate and learn from their peers is also emphasised.

As discussed previously, Piaget's (1952; 1983) cognitive constructivism theory has influenced the inclusion of child-directed learning in early year's classrooms. This influence is made clear in the RtA's definition of child-directed learning:

> To support cognitive development the learning environment should…offer open-ended possibilities in which children can…explore and investigate through play… including taking calculated risks and learning from mistakes. (Education Scotland, 2020a: 47)

Piaget explains the importance of providing children with experiences which promote active engagement with the environment. By challenging children's thinking, this results in cognitive equilibrium.

3.4. Initial Search: Teachers' and Children's Perspectives of Play

It was discussed in Chapter 1 that an implementation gap can exist in education (Harvey, 2008; Winter, 2001). This refers to the gap between the desired outcomes of policy or guidance and what happens in reality. An initial search of the literature revealed the challenges faced by teachers when implementing play pedagogy. Research across different contexts has highlighted that top-down pressure for children to achieve specific targets in skill-based subjects hinders play pedagogy in practice (Bradbury 2014; Levitt *et al,* 2008; Valli and Buese, 2007).

As illustrated earlier, play has typically been defined as a child-directed activity (see section 3.1). As such, research has shown that teachers are uncomfortable to intervene in play (Martlew *et al,* 2011; Stephen, 2010; Sylva *et al,* 1980; Wood, 2004). In addition, restrictive learning environments in school act as a barrier to implementing play pedagogy (Margetts, 2007; Skouteris *et al,* 2012; Wood, 2009).

In order to better understand play and inform pedagogy, it is important to listen to children's perspectives (Whitebread *et al,* 2012; Larsen, 2015). Research has shown that children have clear ideas of what play is and is not (Broadhead *et al,* 2010). Children regard play in opposition to work (Howard, 2002; Keating *et al,* 2000).

It has been found that children use environmental and emotional cues to differentiate play and work, such as "teacher presence, space and constraint, positive affect and nature of activity" (Howard, 2002: 499) and whether the child has choice (Howard and McInnes, 2013; McInnes *et al,* 2011; Thomas and McInnes, 2017). Children use these decisions to decide whether an activity is learning or not learning (Broadhead *et al,* 2010; Keating *et al,* 2000).

Previous research into both teacher and children's perspectives of play will be discussed in more detail later in this review. These perspectives will be used to examine the implementation of play pedagogy in the early years of school in Scotland.

3.5. Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to discuss the influence of learning theories on the current policy and guidance of play pedagogy in Scotland. It summarized three major paradigms and key learning theories: cognitivism (Piaget, 1962), constructivism (Piaget, 1952; 1983; Vygotsky, 1978) and behaviourism (Bandura, 1977).

Analysis of current policy and guidance on play pedagogy in Scotland revealed the prevailing influence of cognitivism (Piaget, 1962), cognitive constructivism (Piaget, 1952; 1983) and social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978). The following chapter will outline the reality of implementing play pedagogy from a teacher's perspective.

Chapter 4: The Reality of Implementing Play Pedagogy from a Teacher's Perspective

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the child learning theories which have influenced play pedagogy policy and guidance in Scotland. The objective of this chapter is to assert the reality of implementing play pedagogy from a teacher's perspective. Four themes emerged through thematic analysis of secondary data: accountability and assessment, role of the teacher in influencing play, environmental barriers and outdoor learning.

In order to set a context for the reader, each theme will begin with the Scottish context. Current Scottish policy and guidance will be put forth. This highlights the disparities between the ideal and reality when implementing play pedagogy. Each theme will now be discussed in turn.

4.2: Theme 1: Accountability and Assessment

4.2.1. Background: Scottish Context

It is widely accepted that schools are under pressure from local authorities and government bodies to perform well in tests and reach curriculum goals (Bradbury 2014; Levitt *et al*, 2008; Valli and Buese, 2007). Taking reference from the language of business, this pressure on teachers is known as 'accountability' and is widely recognised (Kleinhenz and Ingvarson, 2004). Accountability has become a central part of the education system worldwide (Biesta, 2015).

As Chapter 1 discussed, play pedagogy is a current focus in Scottish education. However, accountability and raising attainment are other policy drivers which impact the everyday practice of Scottish teachers (Scottish Government, 2016; Taylor *et al*, 2008). Schools in Scotland measure progress through

tracking and monitoring (Education Scotland, 2015). Scottish teachers are required to take part in tracking and monitoring meetings with senior management to discuss pupil attainment. Pupil targets are set to ensure that children are on track to achieve their expected level in the CfE. Teachers are held accountable when there is a lack of progress or when pupils are deemed 'off-track'.

High-stakes assessments are used by schools to gather information on progress. These describe tests with important consequences which are used to make decisions about students (Biesta, 2015). Currently, almost all local authorities in Scotland administer standardised tests in Literacy and Numeracy for pupils at various points in Primary school, including Primary 1 (Reedy, 2019).

The Scottish Government introduced the 'National Improvement Framework' (hereafter the 'NIF') in 2016 in a bid to raise attainment in Literacy and Numeracy (Scottish Government, 2016). A key component of the NIF (and possibly its most contentious) is the new national standardised Literacy and Numeracy assessments for Primary 1 pupils. Despite assurance from the Scottish Government that the national tests will not be high stakes (due to the fact that there is no 'pass' or 'fail'), they come as part of very high stakes policy: to close the attainment gap. This describes the gap between the most and least privileged pupils regarding educational attainment (ibid).

Upon their implementation, the Primary 1 tests caused much controversy amongst teachers and parents (Reedy, 2015). In response, a 'Primary 1 Practitioner Forum' was created to give Primary 1 teachers a voice in the debate (Primary 1 Practitioner Forum, 2019). Issues were raised over the compatibility of the tests with play pedagogy. Teachers agreed that "play itself is not a learning outcome and the SNSAs are not designed as play-based learning activities in and of themselves" (ibid: 5).

4.2.2. Analysis of Findings

A review of the literature from the past decade confirmed that accountability and assessment hindered teachers from implementing play pedagogy (Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes, 2017; Fisher, 2011; Gray and Ryan, 2016; Nicholson, 2019; Nolan and Patsch, 2018; Ring *et al*, 2016; Roberts-Holmes, 2012; 2015).

Accountability practices forced teachers to alter their pedagogy towards a more structured, teacher centred approach. This is described by one teacher in Gray and Ryan (2016: 198): "We are increasingly target driven and targets are defined by the primary curriculum not play activities…we [teachers] are expected to teach children how to read and write".

Participants saw the need to follow a prescribed, formal curriculum in early years of school as a challenge to play pedagogy. Teachers in Ring *et al* (2016) felt there was less time for play in school in comparison to nursery. This is mirrored by Nicolson (2019), where the discontinuity between nursery and school was captured evidently by two participants:

> EYFS [Pre-school] Teacher: It's learning at their pace. It's learning without them knowing that they are learning. It's really good for social skills as well...It's a lovely curriculum.
> Year 1: You've just got to sit down and go boom boom boom and get them doing it (formal work). (Nicholson, 2019: 454)

Similar to Scotland, five year old children in England are currently tested through the nationally administered 'Foundation Stage Profile' (Standards and Testing Agency, 2018). In addition, the 'Baseline Assessment' will also be introduced in early year's classrooms in England in 2021 (Standards and Testing Agency, 2020). The detrimental impact of assessment on pedagogical practice in England is made clear by one teacher in Roberts-Holmes (2015):

> It has become very clinical and children have just become numbers … In this game, you gotta play the game. If you're being judged on a score – teach to it – you're a fool if you don't. You must teach to the test – that's the agenda. (Roberts-Homes, 2015: 306)

However, school leaders can play an important role in helping to facilitate play pedagogy. School leaders in two small-scale studies using interviews in England saw early year's assessments as a farcical process (Robert-Holmes, 2012; Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes, 2017). They were able to exercise their autonomy to support the implementation of play pedagogy in their settings. Although, they themselves were not exempt from top-down pressure:

> When our governors visit we give them a copy of the four principles [of Early year's curriculum] to look out for, not a copy of all the goals and targets. (Primary Head teacher, North-East) (Roberts-Holmes, 2012: 35).

Each of the selected studies conducted in England were carried out by the same two researchers. The author acknowledges the importance of including a range of authors when conducting secondary analysis to reduce the risk of bias (Viswanathan *et al,* 2018). Therefore, findings should be approached with caution.

4.2. Theme 2: Role of Teacher in Influencing Play

4.2.1. Background: Scottish Context

As outlined in the previous chapter, teachers in Scotland are encouraged to involve themselves in children's play (Scottish Executive, 2007; Education Scotland, 2020a). This is based on Vygotksy's child learning theory (1978). Participating in play allows teachers to "scaffold and extend" children's learning (Education Scotland, 2020a: 49). Scottish guidance states that teachers must be confident to intervene in play and have knowledge of child learning theories (ibid).

4.2.2. Analysis of Findings

The majority of selected studies compared different classroom practices and found that teachers either took an outside or inside role in play (Devi *et al,* 2018; 2020; Fleer, 2015; Gray and Ryan, 2016; Hunter and Walsh, 2014; Martlew *et al,* 2011; McInnes *et al,* 2011; Pyle and Bigelow, 2015; Pyle and Danniels, 2017; Pyle *et al,* 2018).

Teachers who took an outside role did not involve themselves in play. The valuable role of the adult in play was overlooked, as depicted by one participant in Gray and Ryan (2016: 197): "I think it's the only time children have to themselves and it gives them choice. I use it to sort worksheets or admin".

Play and academic learning were dichotomised when teachers took an outside role. The value of learning through play was discounted: "it is difficult to ensure all children are learning something as they play" (Hunter and Walsh, 2014: 27). Teachers were doubtful that children could attain necessary academic skills during child-led play: "The big question is that knowing that children absolutely need these [literacy] skills…how do we make sure that happens while we are taking their lead?" (Pyle and Danniels, 2017:280)

However, teachers who took an inside role saw play as a way to support academic learning. Nine participants in Pyle and Danniels (2017) were observed to situate themselves "along a continuum from silent and non-interfering observer to creator of playful contexts" (ibid: 281). Playful contexts were intended to advance particular academic outcomes. Just as Scottish policy dictates, the teachers knew when and how to intervene in children's play:

> I try not to step over the play but try to get in there and add those little provocations and questions to keep it going. Sometimes it works and other times they are like, "Go away you are ruining our cars". It is figuring out which time is the best to approach. (Pyle and Danniels, 2017: 281)

Similarly, a small sample of teachers in Devi *et al* (2020:9) adopted the role of an "active play partner". The researchers observed that children's play developed as a result of this role. In addition, it allowed academic learning to be applied and transferred in a child-centred manner. Vygotksy's (1978) theory supports this practice.

In sum, teachers who took an inside role were able to scaffold children's thinking and further academic learning. These opportunities were lost when teachers took an outside role in play.

4.2.3. Lack of Knowledge and Training of Play Pedagogy

Some of studies outlined previously revealed that teachers lacked knowledge and training of play pedagogy; particularly the role of the teacher (Gray and Ryan, 2016; Hunter and Walsh, 2014; McInnes *et al*, 2011; Pyle and Danniels, 2017).

Levels of training in play pedagogy varied across studies. In three of the studies, training ranged from little to none (Pyle and Danniels, 2017; Gray and Ryan, 2016; McInnes *et al*, 2011). In Hunter and Walsh (2014), teachers had only taken part in a one-day training session.

In Hunter and Walsh's (2014: 27) questionnaire, one participant admitted they were "still getting to grips with children having choice during play"; while another stated that they found "child-led play difficult". A lack of knowledge of play inhibited teachers' confidence to intervene: "… it almost gives an adult control or an adult-directed tone to play and I'm not sure that is where we want to go" (Pyle and Danniels, 2017: 280).

Just one study sought to examine participants' theoretical knowledge of play (McInnes *et al*, 2011). The influence of Vygotsky (1978) and Piaget's (1963; 1983) theories were made clear by one participant in McInnes *et al* (2011: 126): "We looked at theorists such as Vygotsky and Piaget but that's not play as such, more like theories of learning".

The above quote may suggest a need for teachers to reconnect with child learning theories (particularly those relating to teacher role) in order to advance understanding of play pedagogy. However, broad generalisations regarding teachers' theoretical knowledge (or lack of) cannot be made, as one study is unrepresentative.

4.4. Theme 3: Environmental Barriers

4.4.1. Background: Scottish Context

In preschool settings, children play within flexible, child-centred learning environments and are given freedom over their choice of activities (Yeboah, 2002). The traditional school environment is formal and structured, with teaching and learning being mainly desk-based (Einarsdottir, 2006). Scottish guidance states that:

> The learning environment in the early stages of primary school should not look or feel starkly different from a motivating ELC [Early Learning and Childcare] environment… the school environment should be conducive to learning through play. (Education Scotland, 2020a: 46).

Early years children should be able to investigate and explore an environment with a wide range of resources (including sensory, creative and constructive) independently (ibid). In reference to the previous chapter, this guidance is influenced by Piaget's (1952; 1983) constructivism theory.

4.4.2. Analysis of Findings

In three studies outlined previously, environmental barriers including restricted classroom space and lack of resources inhibited play pedagogy (Fisher, 2011; Nolan and Patsch, 2018; Ring *et al*, 2016). This is depicted by one teacher in Nolan and Patsch (2018):

> There's such a large group … you've got to think of the movement around the room and how you place things… I just don't know how to get there with that many children, with limited resources. (Nolan and Patsch, 2018:47)

The studies confirmed that facilitating play pedagogy necessitates a change to the traditional classroom environment to one more akin to nursery. Early years teachers in Fisher (2011) had to remove tables and chairs to create a more flexible learning environment. Similar to Nolan and Patsch (2018), they also emphasised that lack of resources inhibited play.

These studies reveal that environmental barriers hinder the implementation of play pedagogy in practice. However, this was not a prevalent finding in the analysis so further research is advised.

4.5. Theme 4: Outdoor Play

4.5.1. Background: Scottish Context

As stated the previous chapter, outdoor play is entrenched within play pedagogy in Scotland (Education Scotland, 2020a). The Scottish Government has acknowledged that not all settings have flexible access to the outdoors or have limited resources (ibid). To overcome these challenges, teachers are advised to be "flexible, reflective and solution-focused" (ibid: 29). The role of the teacher is to encourage children to take risks on their own but be aware of when to intervene to support risky play (ibid).

4.5.2. Analysis of Findings

Accountability and assessment, role of the teacher, lack of training and knowledge and environmental barriers also impacted the implementation of outdoor play (Davies and Hamilton, 2018; Fisher, 2011; Little, 2010; McClintic and Petty, 2015; Waite, 2010). Adverse weather was also noted as a potential barrier. Unsurprisingly, this was only found in two of the United Kingdom based studies (Davies and Hamilton, 2018; Waite, 2010).

One participant in Davies and Hamilton (2018) stressed the challenges of accountability and assessment:

> Things are becoming so data driven, so prescribed, you have to do them inside because you need to have proper evidence. You're losing the outdoors because of this pressure. (Davies and Hamilton, 2018: 126)

In each of the four studies, teachers appeared to inhibit risky play. Teachers largely saw their role as a supervisor and risk assessor, as described by another teacher in McClintic and Petty (2015: 35): "Watchdog! My main job is maintaining the safety of the children when they are on the playground because that is where all the accidents happen".

In three out of the four studies, it was highlighted that teachers lacked understanding of outdoor play and had received little training (McClintic and Petty, 2015; Davies and Hamilton, 2016; Little, 2010). This acted as a barrier to its implementation. In addition, environmental barriers such as restrictive outdoor space and limited resources hindered outdoor play in all four studies.

As previously stated, the Scottish Government have recognised that environmental barriers can inhibit outdoor play (Education Scotland, 2020a). This is supported in the current analysis. However, the above studies suggest that there are other challenges to outdoor play, including: accountability, role of the teacher, lack of training and understanding and poor weather which should also be considered. However, findings are unrepresentative due to the small-scale nature of these studies. More research into teachers' perspectives of outdoor play is needed in order make wider conclusions.

4.6. Summary

To conclude, this chapter aimed to ascertain the reality of implementing play pedagogy from a teacher's perspective. There were four themes which emerged. These were accountability and assessment, role of the teacher in influencing play, environmental barriers and outdoor learning.

From a teacher's perspective, there are barriers which hinder play pedagogy in practice. Barriers also inhibit outdoor play. This may suggest a gap between the ideal and reality of implementing play pedagogy in Scotland. The

following chapter will discuss children's perspectives of play in the early year's classroom.

Chapter 5: Children's Perspectives of Play in the Early Year's Classroom

5.1. Introduction

The previous chapter put forth the reality of implementing play pedagogy from a teacher's perspective. This chapter seeks to determine children's perspectives of play in the early year's classroom. Similar to the previous chapter, it will analyse secondary data to form conclusions.

Two themes emerged through thematic analysis of secondary data. These were play versus work and play and learning. Use of cues to determine play and work emerged as a strand of the play versus work theme. There were two strands which emerged from the play and learning theme: play versus academic learning and play and social learning.

As the following section will discuss, the terms 'work' and 'not-play' were both used by researchers when describing children's perspectives. This chapter will use the term 'work' as the majority of the studies found play/work distinctions. Each theme will now be discussed consecutively.

5.2. Theme 1: Play versus Work

5.2.1. Analysis of Findings

In the majority of selected studies, children dichotomised play and work (Breathnach *et al,* 2017; Fisher, 2009; Howard, 2002; Howard *et al,* 2006; Keating *et al*, 2000; King, 1979; Pyle and Alaca, 2018; Robson, 1993; Sanders *et al*, 2005; Theobald *et al*, 2015; Wainwright *et al*, 2020; Wing, 1995). This was summarized by one child in King (1979: 84): "when you work it's not playing". However, it is important to note that the 'work' label was often provided to children through interview questions.

 In other studies, a play/not-play dichotomy was present (Einarsdottir, 2005; 2010; Kahyaoğlu, 2014; McInnes, 2019; McInnes, *et al*, 2011; Wu, 2014). As

the forthcoming section will reveal, activities classed as 'work' and 'not-play' were the same.

5.2.2. Use of Cues to Determine Play and Work

In Chapter 3, it was discussed that children use environmental and emotional cues to distinguish play and work (Howard, 2002; McInnes *et al,* 2011; Thomas and McInnes, 2017). The current analysis echoed Howard's (2002) previous findings. Children used cues to determine play and work, including: choice and control, "teacher presence", "activity and material", "positive affect" and "space and constraint" (Howard, 2002: 499).

Children regarded play as a voluntary activity they could not only choose but control (Breathnach *et al*, 2017; Einarsdottir, 2005; 2010; Howard, 2002; Keating *et al,* 2000; King, 1979; McInnes, 2019; Robson, 1993; Sanders *et al* 2005; Theobald *et al*, 2015; Wainright, 2020; Wing, 1995). On the other hand, work was regarded as a compulsory activity which was out of their control. This was captured by one child in Wing (1995):

> Gemma: Because playing is not the same as working.
> Int: In what way?
> Gemma: Because you write and work, and sometimes you have to do stuff and work. And playing is you just do whatever you want. (Wing, 1995: 228)

Children understood that teachers were in control during work: "because then we have to do exactly like she says and cannot decide ourselves" (Einarsdottir, 2005:481). Work must also adhere to the teacher's standards: "you gotta be sure everything's perfect on your paper" (Wing, 1995: 232).

Linking with the previous chapter, the role of the teacher influenced children's perspectives of play. Children recognised that teachers took an outside role in play and were more likely to be present during work (Einarsdottir, 2005; 2010; Howard, 2002; Howard *et al,* 2006; Keating *et al,* 2000; King, 1979; McInnes, 2019; Robson, 1993; Sanders *et al*, 2005; Theobald

et al, 2015; Wing, 1995). Teachers were regarded as workers not players, as described by three children in Keating *et al* (2000):

> I: And does your own teacher, Miss R, come in and play with you?
> C1: No! (Laughs) No she's got to get on with the other children's work.
> C2: She doesn't play, she's busy doing.
> C3: She doesn't play with me, just my friends. Teachers need to work.
> (Keating *et al*, 2000: 447)

Teacher presence determined which activities and resources were classed as play or work (Einarsdottir, 2005; 2010; Fisher, 2009; Howard *et al*, 2006; Keating *et al*, 2000; McInnes, 2019; Robson, 1993; Sanders *et al*, 2005; Theobald *et al*, 2015; Wainright, 2020; Wing, 1995). Teachers were present during academic activities, such as reading, writing and numeracy. Resources included paper, pencils and books. These activities were therefore regarded as work and not play.

In the above studies, teachers were absent during child-directed (or free play) activities such as role play, construction and arts and crafts. Children therefore regarded these activities (including open-ended resources such as toys, dress up, blocks and paint) as play: "Looking at books. That's not playing. Painting—that's playing" (Keating *et al*, 2000:443).

However, analysis revealed disparities between two studies utilising the AASP-specifically in relation to teacher presence (Kahyaoğlu, 2014; McInnes, 2019). In Kahyaoğlu (2014), Turkish children did not associate teacher presence with work but Welsh children in McInnes (2019) did. The difference in findings could suggest a possible influence of geographical location. However, discussing this influence further is out-with the scope of this review. This is a potential avenue for future research.

Emotional cues were used to classify play or work activities (Breathnach *et al*, 2017; Einarsdottir, 2005; 2010; Fisher, 2009; Kahyaoğlu, 2014; Keating *et al*, 2000; McInnes, 2019; Pyle and Alaca, 2018; Robson, 1993; Sanders *et al*, 2005; Wainwright, 2020; Wing, 1995). Some children experienced negative affect when working: "sometimes I'm not happy doing work… I just do it very

quickly. Cos ... I want to play" (Robson, 1993: 41). In comparison to play, children felt work required increased cognitive effort:

> When you're not using your mind is when you're playing. . . . It's a big, big difference. You really, really try to concentrate really hard when you're working, but not when you're playing. (Wing, 1995: 234)

On the other hand, children associated positive affect with play: "I like playing with the Lego. Because when I am really sad I make stuff and it makes me feel happy" (Sanders *et al*, 2005: 44).

However, some children enjoyed both play and work activities (Einarsdottir, 2010; King 1979; Robson, 1993; Sanders *et al*, 2005): "I like doing hard work...I like numeracy and I like adding up and taking away. I can count up to 102" (Sanders *et al*, 2005: 48). For these specific children, positive affect did not determine play decisions. This could imply that this cue is not attended to by all children. Other factors, such as a child's disposition or cognitive abilities, may influence their feelings towards play and work.

However, three studies highlighted the fluidity of children's perspectives and revealed overriding impact of choice and control (Breathnach *et al*, 2017; McInnes, 2019; Wing, 1995). In Breathnach *et al* (2017), children classed writing as work and perceived it negatively. However, observations revealed that children often engaged in writing during free-play (such as writing labels for role play area) and enjoyed doing so. During such time, children's perspectives of writing changed from work to play. This is captured clearly by one child discussing the difference between writing in school (compulsory) and writing at home (voluntary), using her older brother as an example:

> R: Do you and Harry ... do you do the same things in school ... learning and stuff?
> Olivia: No, he does just work.
> R: Does he? What kinds of things does he do?
> Olivia: Writing and stuff.
> R: What do you do that's different?
> Olivia: Well I do some writing on the weekend...which are different.
> (Breathnach, Danby and O' Gorman, 2017: 447)

Correspondingly, one child in McInnes (2019: 801) regarded reading (an activity often described as work) more positively when given more choice and control: "I like reading on my own. Nobody tells me what to do". This can also occur with typically play activities. One child in Wing (1995) described using the sand as play when it was self-initiated. However, when the teacher directed the child to use the sand for a task (removing their choice and control) it became work:

> Carly: …Like when the sand was here we could do whatever we wanted with it.
> Int: Is it still playing?
> Carly: Urn, no. Now it's estimating. It's like playing only you have to do what the teacher says. (Wing, 1995: 229).

This suggests that children's perspectives depend on who is in charge of instigating and controlling the activity. However, the views of three children are not representative. More research is needed before making general conclusions.

In five of the selected studies, children were more likely to perceive an activity as work if it occurred at a table and play if it took place on the floor (Kahyaoğlu, 2014; Keating *et al*, 2000; Howard *et al*, 2006; McInnes, 2019; Wing, 1995). Contrastingly, children in three studies perceived certain floor-based activities as work (Einarsdottir, 2005; Fisher, 2009; Sanders *et al*, 2005). What distinguished these activities was the degree of restriction felt by the children. These activities required careful listening to the teacher and limited children's movement. This produced negative affect. This is illustrated by two Icelandic children in Einarsdottir (2005), describing 'group time' on the classroom floor:

> R. Do you find group-time that boring? Can you explain why? Why is it so boring?
> Solon. Because we need to sit, and sit and sit.
> Martin. Listen, listen, sit and listen. (Einarsdottir, 2005: 81)

The space and constraint cue was the least prevalent finding in the current analysis. Results from the various studies would also indicate to the researcher that cues children used to distinguish play and work are connected.

5. 3. Theme 2: Play and Learning

5.3.1. Play and Academic Learning: Analysis of Findings

Children's perspectives of play, work and academic learning were related. Seven of the studies outlined previously revealed that children associated academic learning with work not play (Einarsdottir, 2005; 2010; Howard, 2002; Howard *et al*, 2006; King, 1979; Robson, 1993; Theobald *et al*, 2015).

Children defined learning as the acquisition of academic skills such as: "writing, writing, writing" (Einarsdottir, 2005: 475), knowing how to read (Einarsdottir, 2010) and learning the "numbers like 1-2-3-4" (Theobald *et al*, 2015: 356). Children often saw this as the purpose of school, as depicted by one child in Robson (1993: 45): "schools are to learn so we can get more better, then we can do all the things that grown-ups do".

In each of the above studies, teachers took an outside role in play. Instead, teachers were those children learned from: "What do you think about learning? Laura: Uh when you listen at the teachers" (Theobald *et al*, 2015: 356). Their role was to help children learn academic skills:

> R: What do the teachers do in school?
> Kristin: They teach us mathematics and how to measure things. Teach us to write. Teach us to do a lot of things.
> R: But what do you think the teachers should do?
> Kristin: Just teach. (Einarsdottir, 2010: 172)

However, classroom practices may influence children's perceptions of play and learning. Four studies discovered that children associated play and academic learning in classrooms where teachers were more involved in play (McInnes *et al,* 2011; Pyle and Alaca, 2018; Robson, 1993; Wu, 2014): "That's why they are called learning centres. You play and learn" (Pyle and Alaca,

2018: 1069). Comparing different classroom practices (including those of other regions) falls out with the scope of this review. Further research is therefore advised.

5.3.2. Play and Social Learning: Analysis of Findings

In four of the aforementioned studies, children recognised the relationship between play and social learning (Einarsdottir, 2005; Pyle and Alaca, 2018; Robson, 1993; Sanders *et al*, 2005).

Children understood that play enhanced their personal-social skills. This included learning how to behave, collaborating and helping others, sharing and being kind. This is depicted by one child in Pyle and Alaca (2018):

> You get along and be nice and help people that need help when they're trying to build something. And you help them be nice to each other and be friends (Pyle and Alaca, 2018: 1068)

In reference to Chapter 3, both Bandura (1977) and Vygotsky (1978) highlighted the benefits of social interaction through play. Stemming from Bandura (1977), children accepted that play teaches them adaptive behaviour, including how to act appropriately in play situations. Supported by Vygotsky (1978), children valued providing and receiving assistance from others during play. However, this was not a significant finding in the review. This may suggest that teachers could do more to expand children's definition of learning.

5.4. Summary

In conclusion, this chapter set out to discover children's perspectives of play in the early year's classroom. It found two themes in relation to children's perspectives. These were: play versus work and play and learning.

It discovered that children understood what play is and what it is not. Play and work were regarded dichotomously. Analysis confirmed that children used cues to determine play and work: choice and control, "teacher

presence", "activity and material", "positive affect" and "space and constraint" (Howard, 2002: 499). Children's perspectives of play, work and learning were correlated. Largely, children associated academic learning with work and not play. Despite this, the benefits of social learning through play were recognised by some children. The following chapter will synthesise the research findings of this paper and discuss their implications.

6. Chapter 6: Discussion

6. 1. Introduction

The previous chapter outlined children's perspectives of play in the early year's classroom. The aim of the current chapter is to synthesise the key findings of this review. There were three research questions that guided this research. This chapter will begin by discussing the impact of learning theories on current policy and guidance of play pedagogy in Scotland. Following this, the reality of implementing play pedagogy from a teacher's perspective will be examined. Children's perspectives of play in the early year's classroom will then be stated. Implications from the teachers' and children's perspectives studies will be discussed. Pedagogical recommendations will also be put forth. Next, future research recommendations will be made clear. Lastly, the current research will be put into context by referring to the current global pandemic: COVID-19.

6.2. Key Findings: Discussion and Implications

The literature review began with a discussion of the influence of learning theories on current policy and guidance of play pedagogy in Scotland. Three prominent paradigms (cognitivism, constructivism and behaviourism) and their associated child learning theories were closely examined. It revealed that the following theories have influenced Scottish policy and guidance of play pedagogy: Piaget's cognitive (1962) and constructivism (1952; 1983) theories and Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism (1978).

The subsequent chapter discussed the reality of implementing play pedagogy from a teacher's perspective. In reality, studies revealed that accountability and assessment hinder play pedagogy. Top-down pressure, particularly from high-stakes assessments, favours more formal teacher centred pedagogies being adopted. Looking closely at the situation in England, a system of testing in the early years has altered teaching practice. While more research is needed, the Primary 1 tests may pose a threat to the implementation of play pedagogy in early years of school in Scotland.

Supported by theory, Scottish play pedagogy policy advocates the crucial role of the adult in play (Education Scotland, 2020a). In reality, the current analysis revealed that teachers took an outside or inside role. This may suggest a lack of consistency amongst teachers regarding their role in play. Play and academic learning were dichotomised when teachers took an outside role. Those who took an outside role regarded play as solely child initiated activity —one which teachers should not intervene. This confirms the findings of the initial search (see Chapter 3).

If teachers are uninvolved, they could be losing out on important opportunities to support and progress children's learning (Vygotksy, 1978) and 'scaffold' their thinking (Wood *et al*, 1976). Conversely, academic learning can be furthered through play when teachers take an inside role. Being an early year's teacher, the author understands that academic learning is an important aspect of school. However, so too is play. Findings suggest that a teacher's involvement in play could help to unite these two constructs.

Analysis also highlighted that teachers lacked training and understanding of play pedagogy, particularly in relation to child learning theories. Perhaps this may explain the disparities in teachers' roles. However, this finding was less prevalent in the research.

Scottish play pedagogy policy necessitates a change to the traditional classroom environment (Education Scotland, 2020a). Environments should be flexible and allow children to move freely in order to access play provision. In reality, environmental barriers (including lack of space and limited resources) restrict its implementation. Outdoor play is an integral part of play pedagogy in Scotland (ibid). However, previous research revealed that accountability and assessment, role of the teacher, environmental barriers and poor weather hindered outdoor play.

From a teacher's perspective, there are barriers which impede the implementation of play pedagogy. These barriers also inhibit outdoor play. This would suggest to the author that an implementation gap may exist between the ideal of play pedagogy and the reality of implementing it.

Chapter 5 put forth children's perspectives of play in the early year's classroom. Findings largely supported the initial search in Chapter 3. Children had a clear understanding of play and not play. Play was regarded in opposition to work and children used environmental and emotional cues to make decisions.

Children regarded play as an activity which afforded them choice and control. Teachers conveyed that work was obligatory. Teachers were in control during work and were present during academic activities (such as reading, writing and numeracy). Children classed these activities as work. Teachers were absent during child-directed activities. These activities were defined as play. Some children perceived work negatively and play positively. However, analysis revealed that some children enjoyed both play and work. Lastly, activities which limited space and evoked feelings of constraint (at a table or floor) were more likely to be associated with work and not play.

Findings highlighted that children's perspectives of play, work and learning were related. Children largely defined learning as academic learning. Children believed academic learning occurred through work and not play. Interestingly, some children understood the social learning benefits of play- supporting Vygotsky (1978) and Bandura's (1977) child learning theories (see Chapter 3).

The author regarded a relationship between teachers' and children's perspectives of play. Chapter 4 revealed that play and academic learning were separated when teachers took an outside role in play. Teachers who took an inside role saw play as a way to support academic learning. This was mirrored in the analysis of children's perspectives. Studies highlighted that children dichotomised academic learning and play when teachers were absent during play. On the other hand, children understood learning through play in classrooms where adults intervened in play.

This could suggest that children make decisions about play, work and learning by making sense of teachers' roles in the classroom. This emphasises to the author the importance of teachers' actions in the classroom and how children understand these behaviours. The author recommends that teachers should

encourage children to see learning in play through their pedagogical practices, particularly by taking an inside role in play. Participating in play could raise children's awareness of play as a vehicle for learning.

Teachers in Scotland are required to implement play pedagogy in the early years of school. In doing so, they are expected to plan for playful yet educational activities. Cues could be used and adapted to influence pupils' perspectives of play. First, children may perceive activities as play when they have choice and control over the task. By giving children more opportunities to initiate their own learning, this may blur the divide between play and work. This may also encourage children to regard work more positively. The author believes that teachers could ensure that choice (for instance, over resources) is provided where appropriate.

Second, children's perspectives can be altered if teachers are involved with all classroom activities, including both play and work. Third, activities typically classed as work (reading, writing and numeracy) may be perceived more playfully (and more positively) if play resources are used to facilitate these activities. Promoting positive affect in a variety of classroom experiences may also enhance feelings of play. Although, this research showed that some children enjoyed both play and work. Being in-tune pupils' interests and unique dispositions when planning learning and teaching would be beneficial.

Lastly, research suggested that rigid classrooms with restrictive space can induce feelings of work. Flexible learning spaces may increase the perceived playfulness of activities. This is supported by constructivism theories (see Chapter 3). Both Piaget (1983) and Vygotsky (1978) believed that children learn best when actively engaged with the world around them. This opportunity is limited when children sit statically in constricted spaces.

6.2. Conclusion

To conclude, this paper had three research questions. First, it wished to examine the influence of learning theories on the current policy and guidance of play pedagogy in Scotland. The overriding influence of Piaget (1962; 1952; 1987) and Vygotsky's (1978) child learning theories remained evident. Second, it sought to discover the reality of implementing play pedagogy from a teacher's perspective. Barriers hindered its implementation, including: accountability and assessment, role of the teacher and environmental barriers. These barriers also hindered outdoor play.

Lastly, children's perspectives of play in the early year's classroom were sought. It was revealed that children showed a clear idea of what play is and what it is not. Classroom experiences were defined as play or work and were dependent on a number of cues: choice and control, teacher presence, activity and material, positive affect and space and constraint. Children's perspectives of play, work and learning were linked.

6.3. Future Recommendations

While behaviourist theories are generally considered outdated, Chapter 3 discussed the possible benefits of observational learning for autistic children. Examining the impact of play pedagogy with this sample of children using behaviourist principles could be an interesting avenue for future research.

Chapter 4 discussed that many teachers in Scotland were critical of the Primary 1 tests and were given the chance to share their concerns (Primary 1 Practitioner Forum, 2019). This resulted in modification of the assessments themselves. It is important that research on teachers' perspectives continues in order to encourage educational change.

This research would indicate that further training on implementing play pedagogy is required. This training should focus on developing definitions of play and make explicit links with child learning theories. In addition, teachers should be given guidance on how to effectively intervene in play. Guidance on outdoor play should also be firmly embedded within this training. The current research highlighted the important role of school leaders in facilitating play pedagogy. As such, it is recommended that they too take part in this training.

Teachers' perspectives studies were limited to Western countries. By expanding this research, a comparison of teachers' perspectives from different locations could be conducted. Comparing classroom practices (including the impact of geographical location) was out with the scope of this review. Further research examining the impact of these factors on children's perspectives of play is therefore recommended.

6.4. Play Pedagogy in a Global Pandemic

During the writing of this paper, the COVID-19 virus emerged. The virus rapidly transformed the Scottish education system in a drastic and unexpected way. On the 20th March 2020, all pupils and teachers across Scotland left schools confronting a period of momentous change, worry and uncertainty. At the point of writing, social distancing is the 'new normal' across the world. Play pedagogy is built on the importance of social interaction between teachers and pupils. The impact of COVID-19 on the future of play pedagogy is as yet unknown.

However, on 16th July 2020, the Scottish Government stated that children in Scotland will not be expected to social distance when returning to school in August (COVID-19 Advisory Sub-group, 2020). This is fully dependent on continued suppression of the virus and is subject to stringent hygiene and protective measures being adopted in schools.

The Scottish Government has released guidance protecting the need for play pedagogy, particularly for those starting school for the first time (Education Scotland, 2020b). Outdoor play in particular has been highlighted as a

solution; a way to allow children to learn in a playful environment whilst maintaining physical distancing.

The guidance states that "the way ahead is to resist pressures to cover the curriculum" (ibid: 6). Instead, the need to alleviate children's fears and anxieties through play is paramount. The future regarding the containment of the virus remains uncertain. What is certain is the Scottish Government's continued focus on the value of play in the early years of school.

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8. Appendices

Appendix 1

Author(s)	Location
King (1979)	United States of America
Robson (1993)	England
Wing (1995)	United States of America
Keating *et al* (2000)	England
Howard (2002)	Wales
Einarsdottir (2005)	Iceland
Sanders *et al* (2005)	England
Howard *et al* (2006)	Australia
Fisher (2009)	England
Einarsdottir (2010)	Iceland
Little (2010)	Australia
Waite (2010)	England
Fisher (2011)	England
Martlew *et al* (2011)	Scotland
McInnes *et al* (2011)	England
Robert-Holmes (2012)	England
Kahyaoğlu (2014)	Turkey
Hunter and Walsh (2014)	Northern Ireland
Wu (2014)	Germany and China
Fleer (2015)	Australia
Pyle and Bigelow (2015)	Canada
McClintic and Petty (2015)	United States of America
Robert-Holmes (2015)	England
Theobald *et al* (2015)	Australia
Gray and Ryan (2016)	Republic of Ireland
Ring *et al* (2016)	Republic of Ireland
Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes (2017)	England
Breathnach *et al* (2017)	Australia
Pyle and Danniels (2017)	Canada
Davies and Hamilton (2018)	Wales
Devi *et al* (2018)	Australia
Nolan and Patsch (2018)	Canada
Pyle and Alaca (2018)	Canada
Pyle *et al* (2018)	Wales
McInnes (2019)	England
Nicholson (2019)	Australia
Devi *et al* (2020)	Australia
Wainwright *et al* (2020)	Wales