6 Play policy framework for schools

Marilyn Fleer

How to use this policy

Paradoxically, there is increasing pressure on schools to deliver greater academic outcomes, at the same time that there is a desire for innovative, skilled, 21st-century graduates to meet future societal needs. In response to this, some schools have sought to engage learners in key learning areas through play-based pedagogy in support of nurturing creative minds. In this policy, the rationale, purpose, and scope of play pedagogy for schools will be outlined within the context of a play policy framework to support schools with the task of building new thinking and learning for the future. This policy example is intentionally broad and school policy creators are encouraged to delete and build upon suggestions below to create a policy that best represents their school.

[To adapt and use this policy, delete or modify the text as indicated]

[INSERT name of school] Play policy framework for schools

Rationale

Increasingly in Asian heritage communities, schools are looking for ways to enhance the learning of 21st-century skills, whilst maintaining a culture of enjoyment during the process of learning (e.g., Fleer & van Oers, 2018). Many schools are advocating to their communities about the value of play for children's learning (e.g., Ministry of Education, Singapore, 2019). At the same time, in many Western heritage communities, there is growing evidence of pressure to formalise learning and reduce the playtime of children (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2017). As a result, more international attention is being directed to what evidence and challenges surround play as a pedagogy for effective learning in school settings. This evidence is important for guiding policy development.

What is known about practices and learning outcomes of using a pedagogy of play in schools has primarily come from Western heritage communities. The evidence, although limited, has demonstrably shown increased school learning outcomes (Maher & Smith, 2017; Wainwright et al., 2020). The

following are examples of the play pedagogy: mathematical achievement from block play in Italy (Pirrone et al., 2018); literacy outcomes through arts play in Greece (Theodotou, 2019); potential for increased oral language of Indigenous children in Canada (Peterson et al., 2018); positive potential of drama on science achievement in Sweden (Walan & Enochsson, 2019); and a combination of child-led and teacher-guided play improving knowledge of science concepts in Australia (Sliogeris & Almeida, 2019).

Overwhelmingly, studies discuss the value of a pedagogy of play for schools that goes beyond school achievement and towards the wellbeing of students (O'Connor, 2017). There is evidence of social and emotional outcomes for children participating in the play contexts of Forest Schools in the UK (Coates & Pimlott-Wilson, 2019) and of school achievement alongside emotional resilience and self-regulation for children from disadvantaged communities in Forest Schools in the UK (McCree et al., 2018). Traditional games in schools have also been found to increase student motivation in Macedonia (Trajkovik et al., 2018), and when school tasks are perceived by children as play, higher levels of wellbeing have been reported in Wales (Wainwright et al., 2020).

Taken together, the evidence from studies of a pedagogy of play in schools is sufficiently robust to advocate for play and to develop a play policy framework for supporting the wellbeing of the student, alongside the maintenance and enhancement of learning outcomes.

Purpose

The key objective of this policy is to support a whole of school approach to the introduction and development of a play pedagogy in classrooms for student learning and wellbeing.

Scope

This policy supports the senior leadership team, the teaching teams, the students, and students' families with implementing a pedagogy of play. [INSERT specific roles and responsibilities of individuals or teams]

Policy statement

Leaders

[INSERT name of school] has drawn upon research evidence to stay informed about what a pedagogy of play in schools looks like in practice (e.g., Walsh et al., 2019; Fleer, 2019), its value for student learning and wellbeing, and its impact on the school community. [INSERT name of school] recognises that leadership support is critical for a whole of school approach for a pedagogy of play (Barblett et al., 2016). This means:

- supporting teachers to transition into valuing and using a pedagogy of play in schools (Mardell et al., 2019; Nolan & Paatsch, 2018)
- resourcing play to make it inclusive for all children (Lester, Jones & Russell, 2011)
- ensuring pedagogical continuity between prior to school settings as children transition into school (Nicholson, 2019)

Teachers

The teaching team at **[INSERT name of school]** has drawn upon research evidence around effective implementation:

- to embed play-based learning into classroom practice as an integrating approach rather than a separate activity to be given as a reward (Jay & Knaus, 2018)
- for motivating students to want to learn concepts to enrich their play and development (Trajkovik et al., 2018)
- to balance curriculum by giving equal time and status to play, self-regulation, and academic activities (OECD, 2017)
- by organising assessments through play as a valuable approach to determining achievements in highly motivating conditions (Jay & Knaus, 2018)
- through room organisation (Nolan & Paatsch, 2018) that gives different areas for different activities, relaxing spaces, and connects indoors and outdoors (Young & Murray, 2017)
- by organising multi-functional equipment and resources to encourage student autonomy and inclusive access (Young & Murray, 2017)
- high-level interactions between students and teachers during play (Nolan & Paatsch, 2018)

Students

At **[INSERT name of school]** students experience continuity in pedagogy when transitioning into primary school (Nolan & Paatsch, 2018). They understand that they have responsibilities in determining learning outcomes as part of the pedagogy of play approach in school (Walsh et al., 2019) and their self-directed behaviours support the wellbeing of the learning community of the classroom and school (Nolan & Paatsch, 2018).

Community

[INSERT name of school] has committed to communicating with families about the value of their child learning through a play pedagogy in schools.

Rating of evidence base

Figure 6.1. Play Policy Framework for Schools Rating of Evidence.

Author Note. There is excellent evidence for effectiveness the policy in before-school settings, and if that evidence is used in conjunction with the related studies, then the policy is strongly grounded in research. Studies report impact or give guidance on what worked and what the challenges were. The constant variable is pedagogy of play in schools, and the study context and areas reported are broad, which together gives strong evidence for generalisability to other schools for what has been referenced in this policy document. Resourcing is in supporting teachers to transition to the use of a pedagogy of play to support learning in schools. The rest is easy to implement. It is cost neutral in terms of resources, but high-cost for professional development (PD). Transformative change in the experience of the learner in schools is the potential result.

Authorship

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[INSERT RELEVANT STAFF MEMBERS]

Related policy and documents

[INSERT RELEVANT POLICY AND DOCUMENTS]
Play Wales. (2012). *School Play Policy*. <https://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/schoolplaypolicy>
The Scottish Government. (2013). *Play strategy for Scotland: Our action plan*. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/play-strategy-scotland-action-plan/>
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Date of ratification

This policy was ratified on the [INSERT DATE].

Date of review

This policy will be reviewed by [INSERT DATE].

Further reading

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