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Realising the ambition:

Being Me

National practice guidance
for early years in Scotland

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The following terminology is used throughout this guidance:

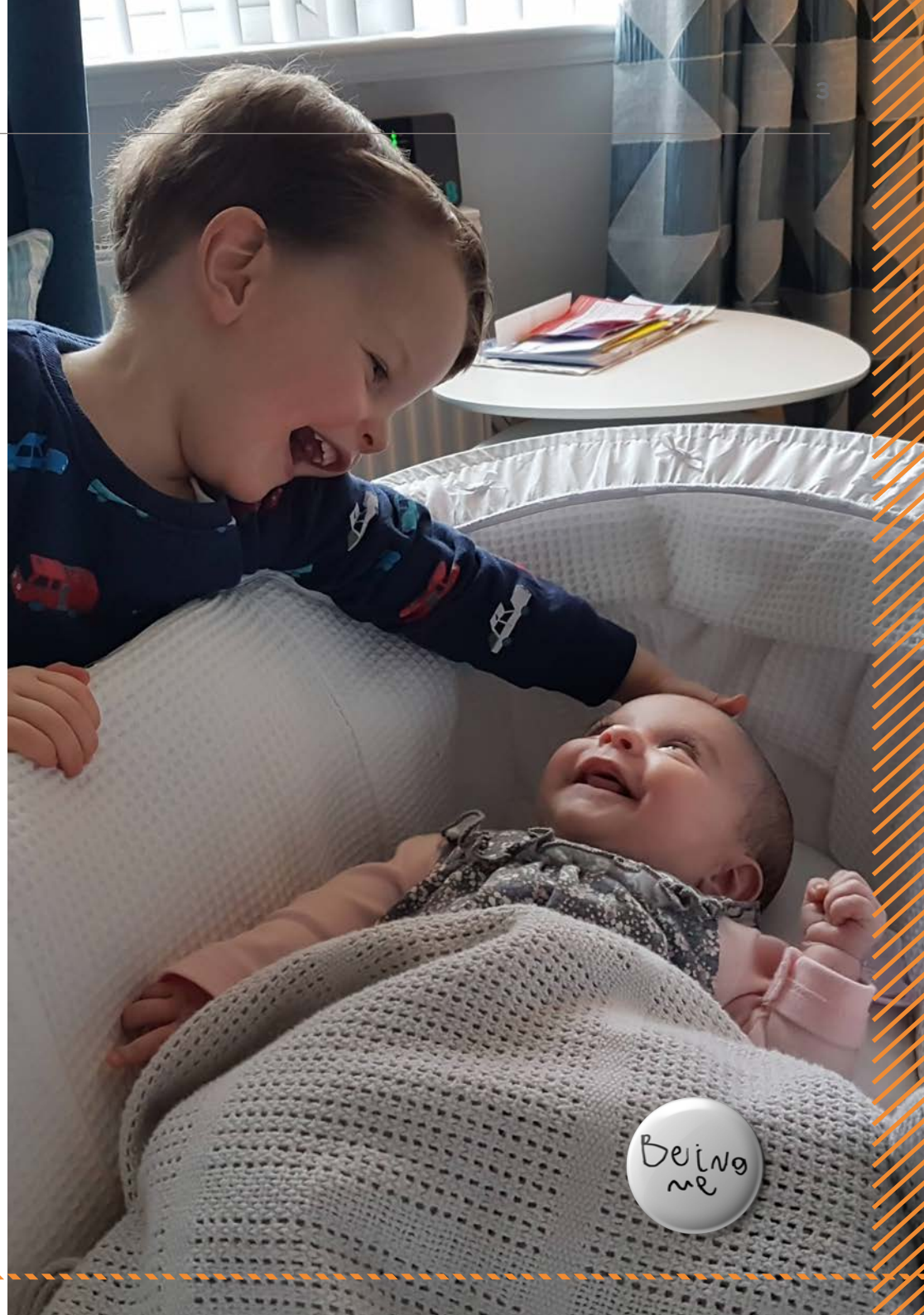
- For the purposes of this document, ‘practitioner’ is a single term which encompasses all staff and adults who are qualified and or registered to work with babies and young children and includes childminders, teachers, headteachers, managers, supervisors, support and out of school care workers. Where there is a specific emphasis on the nature of childminding, the term ‘childminder’ is used. When we use the term ‘adults’ we include parents and carers as important contributors to the education and care of babies and children.

- The Act means the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

- Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) – encompasses all previous terminology related to pre-school provision and early education. It also refers to the different types of settings, such as private, voluntary and independent providers, Gaelic Medium Education (GME) settings, local authority settings, voluntary groups and childminding.

- Additional Support for Learning and issues of equality and diversity, although not specifically noted, are taken as being implicit throughout the text and are integral to the delivery of high quality early learning and childcare.

- The term ‘setting(s)’ encompasses all of the physical environments, both outside and inside which babies and children access. For example, the family home, and where relevant, a childminder’s home environment, early learning and childcare gardens and playrooms, and playgrounds and classrooms in primary schools.



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We know how much the early learning and childcare sector valued Building the Ambition – the national practice resource that was published in 2014. When I visit early learning and childcare settings up and down the country I see that resource shaping every-day practice and ethos. It is a much cherished document and nothing in that original publication sits at odds with what we still consider to be good practice. However, as we prepared for the expansion of funded early learning and childcare in August 2020, it was time for a refresh.

The unprecedented focus on the earliest stages in children's learning journey, and the growing evidence-base on how this builds the foundations for their later outcomes, means that we have even more insights into how we can shape practice to give children the very best start in life. Extending funded entitlement to eligible two year olds also means that that our funded offer needs to reflect a wider developmental understanding from birth and even earlier. Our commitment to addressing and mitigating the impact of adverse childhood experiences also needed to be reflected in our national practice guidance, as it is already in much of the practice we see across the sector. With the early level Curriculum for Excellence reaching to the end of primary 1, there also needs to be a consistency between practice in early learning and childcare and early primary school so that the transition is as seamless as possible. This refreshed national practice resource therefore speaks directly to and has been tested with primary school teachers as well as educators working in the early learning and childcare sector.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to and commented on this resource. You have succeeded in putting the child at the centre. I am confident that what you have produced together will make a useful contribution to practice across the early level and that this new resource will be just as valued as its predecessor.

There has never been a stronger focus on ensuring that the early learning and childcare experience is of high quality and meets the developmental needs of our youngest learners. As we said in the Early Learning and Childcare Quality Action Plan in 2017, and I hope is clear from this new resource, the quality of the interactions that children have with adults who are caring for them fundamentally affects not only their enjoyment of early learning and childcare but also the contribution that this makes to their development. As the title of this new resource suggests, through the increased investment in early learning and childcare, and the commitment and dedication of the sector to practice that reflects the principles of nurture, and the importance of relationships, we move closer and closer to realising the ambition of making Scotland the best place in the world to grow up.

Maree Todd MSP

HM Chief Inspector and Chief Executive's Foreword

I am delighted to introduce this new early years National Practice Guidance, Realising the Ambition: Being Me. The document has been creatively and sensitively designed to guide and support all those who work with babies and children in the early learning and childcare sector and beyond into the early years of primary school in Scotland. Threaded throughout the document you will find updated information, detailed advice based on recent research and signposting to a wide range of professional development resources.

Realising the Ambition: Being Me builds on the premise contained in the original guidance Building the Ambition and Pre-Birth to Three, that our babies and children deserve the very best experiences throughout their learning journey; before birth and beyond. Realising this ambition can only be achieved if all of our services aspire to provide our babies, children and their families with flexible, accessible and affordable provision of the highest quality.

Research has shown that children's life chances, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, can benefit socially, emotionally and cognitively by accessing world class early years education. The golden thread that links provision, opportunity and potential is quality.

Our expansion programme is ambitious and achievable. Our uniquely Scottish programme will provide funded early learning and childcare of 1140 hours per year for all 3 and 4 year olds, and for around a quarter of 2 year olds from August 2020. This national practice guidance will therefore be an invaluable resource to practitioners and others as they plan for babies' and children's learning journeys and transitions within and across an expanded service. Our children will undoubtedly benefit if practitioners engage fully with the guidance contained in Realising the Ambition: Being Me as they strive for excellence and equity in all aspects of their practice.

I am confident as we move into the next decade, in this transformational phase of early years education in Scotland, that our ambition to improve outcomes for children and families will be realised. Education Scotland looks forward to working with you as a professional workforce in promoting and valuing the merits of play pedagogy within creative, imaginatively resourced settings and schools. Together we can and will continue to place the needs of our very youngest citizens and their families at the heart of everything we do.

Gayle Gorman

Section 1:
Introduction

1.1 Background – Why we need this refreshed document

Since 2013 there has been a determined focus by the Scottish Government to work towards realising the ambition for Scotland to be the best place for children to grow up in and learn. Changes to the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, have resulted in our youngest children, particularly those from birth to starting school, being at the heart of significant new developments. In 2014 Scottish Government started to increase the number of hours of funded provision to 600 hours for 3 and 4 year olds and some two year olds. The national practice guidance, "Building the Ambition" was commissioned at this time to complement the new policy developments and to support practitioners. The further expansion of funded Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) to 1140 hours per year for all 3 and 4 year olds, and for around a quarter of 2 year olds will be available from August 2020.

This expansion to 1140 hours seeks not only to extend funded places, but to also improve the quality of our ELC provision across Scotland. We know that the earliest years of life are crucial for every child. Evidence tells us that, if our early learning and childcare offer is to help children fulfil their potential and contribute to closing the poverty related gap in children's outcomes, it has to be **high quality**.

To support the expansion it was decided to refresh the original Building the Ambition, incorporating and updating relevant aspects of the Pre-Birth to Three guidance and extending across the child's learning journey into the early years of primary school.

This new guidance, Realising the Ambition: Being Me, reflects the original principles and philosophy of Building the Ambition and complements the current policy direction of ELC and early primary education. It aspires to support practitioners in delivering what babies and young children need most and how we can most effectively deliver this in Scotland to give children the best start in life.

1.2 What are the aims of the guidance?

The practice guidance aims to support anyone who works with and for babies and young children across all areas of Scotland. It has been designed to:

- build confidence and capability of those who work with children and families from pre-birth to starting school and beyond,
- make links between practice, theory and policy guidance to reinforce aspects of high quality provision and the critical role practitioners play,
- clarify some aspects of current practice and provide a reference which practitioners can easily use,
- support improvement and quality by encouraging discussion, self-reflection and questioning about relevant practice in each setting, and,
- provide advice on achieving the highest quality of ELC and early primary provision that will enable young children to experience and to play their own part in Scotland being the best place in the world to grow up.

1.3 ELC expansion rationale

Evidence from both UK and international evaluations and studies of early years programmes support the fact that all children, and especially those from the least advantaged backgrounds, can benefit in terms of social, emotional and educational outcomes from attending high quality ELC provision.

A key finding from research[1] is that, if children are to benefit from ELC it must be of high quality, with poor quality provision shown to have detrimental effects on children's development. That is why quality is described as 'the golden thread' at the heart of the expansion in funded ELC entitlement for all 3 and 4 years, and eligible 2 year olds, to 1140 hours from August 2020.

1.4 Making it happen – developing the workforce

A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland - Quality Action Plan[2] makes it clear that a high quality workforce is the single most important driver of the quality of a child's ELC experience.

Continuous professional learning (CPL) is an essential component of ELC quality and is linked to children's development. We want a well-trained, professional and skilled workforce with access to high quality professional learning to help deliver the best ELC experience for our children. To achieve this, Scottish Government has invested in a workforce development programme which will ensure all staff, irrespective of their settings, and including childminders, are aware of best practice and are continually supported in their workplace.

The programme includes:

- a national induction resource (Action 3)[3] aimed primarily at new staff including advice on funding for further qualifications, legal requirements for working in childcare and information and support throughout their career,
- a National Directory of Continuous Professional Learning (Action 5)[4] to help the ELC sector identify developmental support available to them once qualified, and,
- a series of online CPL modules (Action 4)[5] focussed on areas where practice and/ or existing opportunities for CPL need to be strengthened, will be available to **all** early learning and childcare providers and open to **all** ELC practitioners – not just those delivering the statutory entitlement – through virtual and distance learning models.

The online suite of modules developed by Scottish Government are designed to complement the ideas and areas outlined in this national practice guidance.

The modules can be accessed from a link on the SSSC website and from the Education Scotland ELC summary page on the National Improvement Hub https://education.gov.scot/improvement/practice-exemplars/a-summary-of-elc-resources/

1 http://www.healthscotland.scot/media/1613/rapid-evidence-review-childcare-quality-and-childrens-outcomes.pdf
2 https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2017/10/blueprint-2020-expansion-early-learning-childcare-scotland-quality-action-plan/documents/00526782-pdf/00526782-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00526782.pdf

3 Page 7 of the Action Plan
4 Page 9 of the Action Plan
5 Page 8 of the Action Plan

1.5 What you will find in this updated guidance

This practice guidance puts into context Scottish Government's commitment to expanding ELC. It will take you through the reasons for expansion, the opportunities this presents, and will provide support in making important changes.

It develops further key information about the characteristics of child development and what we need to provide for babies and young children as they learn and grow. We look again at pedagogy and practice and extend the connections to across the whole of the early level of Curriculum for Excellence (CFE). We retain and expand the focus on the learning environment in terms of **interactions, experiences** and **spaces** to raise our expectations of what high quality may look like in different settings.

In essence "Realising the Ambition: Being Me" increases expectations of high quality but still provides the necessary support for all who work within the sector and beyond.

It is for use by anyone who works with and for babies and young children such as childminders, practitioners in local authority, private, voluntary and independent nurseries, playgroups, day care centres, crèches, out of school care providers, teachers in primary schools, students, and those who work in colleges, universities, regulatory bodies, other training providers and other interested groups.

1.6 How to use the guidance

High quality provision consists of many different interconnected aspects. The imagery of tartan has been used to remind us of the uniqueness of our Scottish context – with each section seen as an interconnected thread contributing to the whole piece. Although each section has been developed so it can be used in any order to meet different needs and different contexts we must always be mindful of this bigger picture.

The terms of 'when I am a baby', 'when I am a toddler' and 'when I am a young child' have been used to illustrate developmental needs over time – but these should not be seen as rigid lines of progression. All babies and young children develop their individual skills, knowledge and attributes at different rates according to who they are. The guidance can be used to support children with more complex needs by taking this into account.

The guidance can be used individually, or in short informal group settings where practitioners have time to come together, or as part of a more substantial Continuous Professional Learning (CPL) programme. We would recommend that at points of transition between ELC and primary school, the guidance is used by designated staff working together to promote a clear understanding of curriculum progression and continuity in children's learning and development.

The idea is that the guidance can be used flexibly dependent on current need including as a tool to manage change. For example, within a setting sections can be extracted and used in a number of ways to:

- encourage continuous professional learning,
- support the learning of new students and practitioners,
- draw on past experiences of working with children, reflecting and carrying new ideas forward into current practice,
- focus on what practitioners already know about children's learning and development and support areas where they are less confident,
- provide help in working with children as they progress through different stages of development, and,
- empower practitioners to feel confident about using the child as the starting point for the nature and design of the curriculum on offer and for future learning.

This guidance should be used with Education Scotland's advice on Gaelic Medium Education (GME) to ensure that the principles of total immersion are followed. Interactions in Gaelic are a key driver in planning progression in the curriculum for GME.

For more information on GME see:

https://education.gov.scot/improvement/self-evaluation/comhairle-mu-fhoghlam-gaidhlig-advice-on-gaelic-education/

https://education.gov.scot/nih/Documents/Gael3-7total%20immersion.pdf

https://education.gov.scot/nih/Documents/Gael3-4GME.pdf

"Me, Mummy, Daddy and my brother having a walk in the sun."

You will see examples of children's drawings and writing throughout this guidance.

Right from the beginning there has to be an assumption that the child is trying to express and communicate meaningful things

(Foundations of Writing, 1986)

Section 2: Being Me - Starting Strong

2.1 The image of the developing child

The European Commission working group on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) describes the image of each child as:

> a unique and a competent and active learner whose potential needs to be encouraged and supported. Each child is a curious, capable and intelligent individual. The child is a co-creator of knowledge who needs and wants interaction with other children and adults. As citizens children have their own rights which includes early education and care.

(European Commission, 2014)

Anyone who has watched a young human being grow from grainy scan images before they are born through infancy into childhood knows that there is a lot going on. The physical changes are obvious, as children rapidly outgrow their clothes and gradually change shape. There are also changes taking place in what children can do. They start moving around, making sounds, giving us instructions and acting on the world to explore and change it. Inside, where we cannot see, the changes in brain development are even more striking. Every time a baby, toddler or young child acts on the world, or interacts with another human, billions of connections between brain cells are being formed, tested and refined (Vértes and Bullmore, 2015). We know from research that early attachment experiences are important for brain development.

This guidance does not promote any particular theory of child development but aims to invite practitioners to reflect on their practice by drawing attention to the essential elements of any complete or useful theory in supporting the developing child. However, as O'Connor (2018) suggests, our focus should be on supporting babies and children when they are with us in our settings, to form a secure and emotionally resilient attachment base which will stand them in good stead as they grow and develop.

In order to understand child development in general, and the development of any particular child, we need to keep in mind three aspects; the child as an individual, their environment, and the socioeconomic culture which surrounds the child and family (Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2012).

Me as an individual

Each child's needs should be at the centre of how we think about and plan for their unique development. Children have their own ideas and plans, and their brains and bodies are good at seeking out the kinds of activities, environments and encounters that they need to help them develop.

Much of what children learn in the first few years, they often discover naturally for themselves, in their own way and in their own time. For this development to be successful, babies in particular, need to know their caregiver is nearby and that the support they provide is unconditional, continuous, reliable and predictable (O'Connor, 2018). Everything we do in ELC and early primary should be about helping the child to grow emotionally, socially, physically and cognitively.

Me and my environment

We often talk about the environment in terms of physical **spaces**, but **the key part of the environment for children is the human, social environment of positive nurturing interactions**. **Experiences** are also part of the environment. Children need to learn things for themselves, but this does not mean they should always do so **by** themselves. We can, by following and building on children's motivations and interests, support young children to make the most of the environment for learning and development.

For children, **now** is more important than the futures we plan for them. Rigid ideas of 'school readiness' or what children 'should' be doing, place too much emphasis on the practitioner's concerns about the future (Carlton and Winsler, 1999). Instead, we need to be confident that in promoting a happy, interesting and empowering learning environment, considering the **interactions, experiences** and **spaces** on offer, we as practitioners add value to what children already know and can do.

My surrounding culture

Development also happens within the social and economic (socioeconomic) culture which surrounds the child. We want our children to have the strongest start in life, in a culture where they receive the right kind of support and experiences to lead secure and flourishing future lives.

For instance, too many children in Scotland are experiencing growing up in financial poverty. This creates complex issues and can cause many misconceptions. Financial poverty does not define the potential of children and it does not equate to a 'poverty of aspirations'. All parents want the best for their child(ren) but parents with lower incomes are less likely to know what is possible or how to achieve it. We must be mindful of this and seek to mitigate the experience gap that can happen as a result[6].

There is a balance to be struck. On the one hand, there is the knowledge and skills that we want children to develop, such as self-regulation, confidence, and curiosity. On the other hand, we know that this is best done in a child-centred way where children have permission to follow their interests and to develop at their own pace.

We need to be confident we are providing the kind of rich culture, including high quality **experiences** and sensitive **interactions** in a variety of outdoor and indoor **spaces**, which will develop in babies, toddlers and young children, the emotional resilience they need to form a secure wellbeing base.

6 https://era.ed.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/1842/25787/CRFR%20briefing%2091%20-%20Treanor.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

2.2 Being me from my earliest days

We need to understand that each child's life story is complex with many influences and factors that shape who they are. There is a strong relationship between early life experiences and how a baby will develop, cognitively, socially, emotionally and physically throughout their lives. It is during the earliest years including pre-birth, that a large part of the pattern for a baby's life is set.

During the time in the womb a baby's brain is developing all the time, basic functions such as breathing, sight, hearing are all developing along with a baby's ability to sense the outside world. It is known that babies are born with a unique personality and an adaptable brain, which is ready to be shaped by relationships and experiences.

Research has shown that how a baby develops in the womb has a big effect on their health for the rest of their lives. In particular, towards the end of pregnancy, during the last six to eight weeks, babies start to learn in a way that will prepare them for what they are going to respond to in the world outside:

- towards the end of a pregnancy research now tells us that a baby is naturally affected by what its mother eats. For example, if a mother eats a lot of spicy food it is likely that a baby is more likely predisposed to learn to enjoy this taste later when a bit older (Professor Vivette Glover Pre-Birth to Three LTS, 2010),

- similarly, research has also found that babies can respond to particular types of music. When a baby hears of music, which is played before they are born they may show a reaction to the same music after birth. What this also means is that words, speech, songs, and rhythms of language are intuitively picked up by a baby before birth (Professor Colwyn Trevarthen, Pre-Birth to Three LTS, 2010),

- the emotional state of a mother when pregnant can affect how the baby's brain develops in the womb. If a mother is more stressed or anxious it is more likely that a child may, but not always, grow up to have similar issues. Therefore there is a strong connection between genetics and the innate predisposition of the baby in the womb and the external factors of the mother's own environment (Professor Vivette Glover, Pre-Birth to Three LTS, 2010), and,

- the way a baby enters the world can have an impact on their development throughout their lives. A traumatic birth or early adversity can have long term implications for both mother and child.

It is important to consider the life-stories of the children in our settings from their earliest days. Practitioners should seek to learn from parents and carers the significant information about a child's previous experiences. In saying this we cannot and should not seek to find out everything about a child and their circumstances – this is impossible and often unhelpful. Simply be attentive and know that a baby or young child comes into our care with their own unique set of countless experiences and interactions that have shaped who they are and how they respond to their world. What we can be certain about and in control of is the quality of what we offer through our ELC and early primary settings. This should always impact development in a positive way.

So what can we learn from practice and research?

Babies are born exquisitely sociable, you only have to pick up a new-born baby to see that they seek eye contact. They are born with a predisposition to form relationships and make connections with others. This early social interaction is important for babies in order to build the right structures that they are going to need for the rest of our lives. Positive loving relationships are essential to the baby's health and wellbeing, and helps shape their growing self both now and in the future (Robin Balbernie, Pre-Birth to Three LTS, 2010).

Understanding the role other agencies play in the lives of babies and young children enhances our work in ELC and early primary. High quality maternal and neonatal care is at the heart of Scotland's aim to ensure that every baby born has the best start in life. The importance of families are central so that all women, babies and their families get the highest quality care according to their needs as outlined in the "The Best Start, a five –year plan for Maternity and Neonatal Care in Scotland". The key objective is that the best family-centred care will help to build strong family relationships and confident parenting. At the very early stages support will usually be from a midwife, health visitor or family nurse.

Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) is a programme, originally developed in the United States of America, where specially trained nurses work with first time young mothers to support them to make positive choices for themselves and their children. The FNP in Scotland is designed to reach all eligible first time mothers under 19 years, and some mothers under 25 in almost all Health Boards in Scotland. The programme is offered to them and delivered at home with a specially trained nurse on a one-to-one basis with the mother from early pregnancy until their child is two years of age. Building positive relationships between the mother and the nurses is of paramount importance.

"Ready Steady Baby" is an online resource published by NHS inform and is a valuable, accessible document to help new mums-to-be and their families, highlighting helpful information about the journey from pregnancy to birth and beyond. The information provided includes a description of a baby's development in the womb week to week, and information on birth and parenthood up to when the baby is 8 weeks.
Here are just three examples adapted from the online resource:

- the sex of the baby and colour of their hair will have been determined at conception,
- the importance of taking Healthy Start vitamins and folic acid because a baby's spine develops very early in pregnancy as these can help prevent conditions such as spina bifida, and,
- attachment and bonding before birth – a baby can hear their mother's voice most clearly from about 16 weeks but anyone can talk and sing to them. This helps a baby feel more secure and gets them ready for when they will eventually talk themselves.

To find out more about "Ready Steady Baby" use this link https://www.nhsinform.scot/ready-steady-baby

Pre-birth to Three (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2010) reflected on four key principles of the **Rights of the child, Relationships, Responsive care** and **Respect**. All four principles are as relevant and current today. They are interrelated and interdependent. It is important to draw on previous knowledge and research to help us appreciate the incredible process that human life is capable of and how as practitioners we may better understand this crucial time and the role we play in supporting young children and their families.

2.3 Being a baby, a toddler and a young child

The crucial role we play in supporting children's development and learning and in recognising the impact our practice can have cannot be underestimated. In order to do this effectively we need to have some understanding of the pattern of development of young children from pre-birth to growing into a young child. It is important to know how children develop and learn from the beginning, how they are developing at any point in time, and how they might develop and learn in the future.

There are certain characteristics that are likely to be shared by children of similar ages. Understanding this can help in providing experiences opportunities and interactions which are broadly appropriate. However, age alone is not the predetermining factor in children's development.
Each child will progress in their own way and at their own rate as there are no set rules for when a child stops being a baby and starts being a toddler or a slightly older child. For example, you can usually see this overlapping nature of development more obviously in areas like walking and talking but it is equally valid for all areas of development.

Sometimes this can be puzzling for the practitioner working with very young children. Progression is often uneven across different aspects of development. This is to be expected and is quite natural. Understanding this helps to provide experiences, opportunities and interactions which are more developmentally appropriate.

Accepting and appreciating that this uneven pattern of development is how children develop and learn gives practitioners the confidence to make changes to their environments and practice that will provide the best experiences and meet children's learning needs more effectively.
Responding to the child's actual development in order to adapt and provide what is best at that time for the child is key, rather than expecting a child to fit into a fixed and pre- determined group programme or plan.

Being a baby

From birth, babies know how they like to be held, be comforted and who they like to be with. They have already gained a range of skills learned in the womb. These skills help a new-born baby make secure attachments and reciprocal relationships with their caregivers. Babies are making active choices, even at this early age, and are deciding how they prefer their world to be. They want and need to make relationships with the people around them.

Babies thrive when they experience relationships which are warm, secure, consistent, loving and responsive. Learning while being carefully nurtured suggests an emotional response and commitment to the child. Babies are eager and keen to make sense of their world around them. They have an innate power or drive to develop and revise their thinking processes.

Advances in neuroscience and the use of technology now give us an insight into how the baby's brain develops and the potential of the baby's ability to learn and grow.

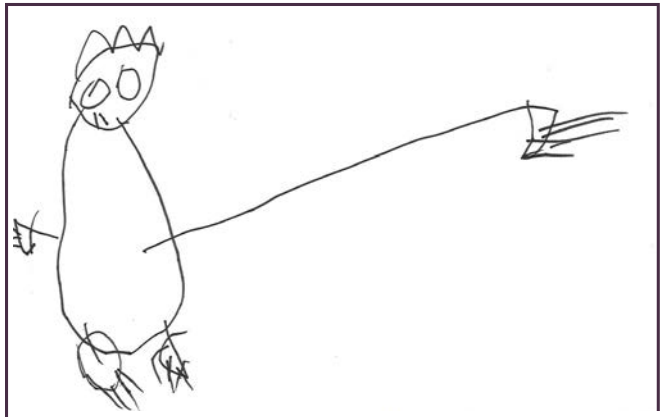
The more practice a baby gets in recognising similarities and patterns in the world around them, the more competent they will become as brain connections increase quickly as they begin to make sense of their world. They learn through using their senses, being active and mobile, through inquiry, communicating in a variety of ways, discovering new things and interacting with others. Babies do this by practising their skills over and over again, returning to previous connections in order to make sense of their world.

Being a toddler

When the baby starts to be mobile their world changes and the desire for independence increases.

Toddlers become more involved in doing things for themselves; they have a very strong drive to repeat actions, move things from one place to another, they cover things up, put things into containers, move in circles and throw things. These actions can be observed frequently through their play. This learning through these repeated actions and engagement can be described as a form of schematic play. The toddler still enjoys familiar routines and experiences. Having these routines gives them the confidence to explore further and take risks. They are still dependent on having a familiar person nearby who gives them support, encouragement and care. It is a testing time for the child and the adults around them, as life is full of frustrations and contradictions, making things at times unpredictable. Toddlers will often become frustrated where they have problems vocalising their feelings and this may lead to some challenging phases.

Caring for children at this stage requires sensitivity and understanding to the child's conflicting needs for the balance of independence, risk, reassurance and support.



"This is my baby sisiter. She has little nails."

Being a young child

As children get older they become more independent and sociable. They need to be active both physically and mentally as they have a growing capacity to think, inquire and communicate. They enjoy conversations and have a rapidly growing vocabulary. They often show more perseverance in their play and concentrate on experiences which are interesting and personally meaningful.

As the young child develops and learns they may continue to engage in schematic play often integrating and coordinating schemas by exploring more than one at a time. Cathy Nutbrown suggests that the coordination and connection of schemas lead to higher-order concepts, refines the child's skills leading to consolidation of their learning through opportunities to develop and apply them in familiar and new situations. Their schematic play may become more sophisticated and you will observe a wider range of skills being developed that link crucially to early literacy and numeracy. For example, moving on from filling and emptying to using materials to, match and sort, order by size, count one for one and recognise the number of objects in a group without counting them (**subitise**). Exploration of volume and capacity and concepts such as full/empty and heavy/light. A developed interest in rotation and trajectory can lead to mark making as the young child makes circular patterns using their fingers with paint and begins to make horizontal and vertical marks representing their drawings and 'writing'.

The defining feature of being a young active learner is the need to widen experiences and learning in all areas of development. The important role for the practitioner is to determine what the young child could learn through their own interests, balanced with learning across the areas of the curriculum. Supporting this in a quality learning environment with high quality interactions will enable the young child to support and extend their learning, deepen thinking and make progress.

Section 3: What I need to grow and develop

3.1 How I grow and develop

There are so many things that children need to learn and develop to be able to thrive in the modern world. Looking at developmental checklists, tables of milestones, and the many experiences and outcomes of the curriculum can be overwhelming both from a planning and a tracking point of view, let alone trying to explain them to families. This reinforces the highly-skilled and often complex role we face in ELC and early primary.

A young child's development often involves repetition and cycles of actions and interactions. As a starting point, research with young children supports the view that the following dimensions are among the most important aspects of child development, underpinning not just learning but also essential for survival and flourishing: **executive function and self-regulation, communication and language, confidence, creativity and curiosity, movement and coordination**, and **self and social development**.

Each of these five dimensions links to the others, but every child develops them differently and in different patterns. Some children will develop movement and coordination more readily than communication and language, while for others, the opposite will be true (van Dijk and van Geert, 2014). Development is not a race or an endurance contest. For instance, the extended hours of ELC in Scotland offers children the opportunity to deepen and broaden their learning and development rather than progress through the curriculum more quickly. We will always be doing the right thing if we are aware of each child's development and are providing interactions and opportunities that match the needs of the child. We also need to be mindful of the fundamental role of the parent as care-giver and as the child's first educator.

Let's look at the definitions of each dimension:

Executive function and self-regulation

Executive function is sometimes referred to as the brain's "air traffic control system". It includes working memory, which is a set of stores for information we are using right now – for example when we hold directions to a new place in our mind until we get there. When we pay attention to something for a while, or switch focus to a new thing, or when we persist with an activity despite distractions all of these draw on executive function.

Self-regulation covers all the skills and processes that help us to stay safe and to get through the day. For babies and young children, the necessary abilities, and the brain systems that underlie them, are still developing. They don't know whether one situation is more serious than another, and their brains may well take the "safety first" approach of assuming it is worse than it is. They do not have the skills or experience to manage strong feelings, whether of fear, hunger or happiness.

Babies and young children often need to "borrow" our ability to manage stress, whether it is the adult's understanding that all is well, or help to manage the strong feelings, or to work out what to do about it. There is a connection here, too, with executive function. Babies and young children cannot attend to much more than one thing at a time. They can switch their attention from a strong feeling of fear or sadness to feeling reassured with our support.

Communication and language

The importance of **communication and language** development for all aspects of children's lives cannot be overstated. Communication underlies our ability to manage behaviour and emotions, by expressing what we need or using language to regulate how we feel. Language is also much more than words. It is understanding and using patterns and cues for interaction, sequencing thoughts and ideas, and making stories that help us understand what is happening, and what is next.

Confidence, creativity and curiosity

Confidence can be described as a set of beliefs that we can do for ourselves, or as part of a group, that are worth doing. It includes being able to keep going even if things are difficult at first, as well as having a realistic sense of when help is needed.

Creativity is about much more than expressive arts, it is the ability to wonder about things, to see them or use them differently. Creativity is vital for all learning. Think about the creativity involved in the everyday problems we face. Consider the pace of change in our world and how we need to ensure our children are equipped with the right skills for their future. The foundations are built from the child's earliest years. Creativity is crucial within science, technology, engineering and mathematical learning (STEM). It is also essential to language and literacy development.

Curiosity, as well as creativity, is an innate part of being human. It is the urge to learn and develop, to see what is around the corner, in the box or what happens next.

Movement and coordination

As adults, if we are able, we often take for granted the ability to get to where we want, pick up what we need, avoid hazards and move co-operatively with others in games or traffic. But these skills take a long time, and a lot of practice, to develop.

We all have a sensory system called the vestibular system which gives us our sense of balance and spacial awareness. It helps us coordinate our large and fine motor movements and maintain our posture. **The development of movement and coordination for a child is linked to communication and cognitive development.** For instance, a young child with an developing vestibular system will find it almost impossible to sit still for any length of time or possess the fine motor skills and coordination required for writing before they are ready. This is why observations of a children's actions are crucial to inform our practice and ensure it is developmentally appropriate.

The best way to help babies and young children develop this system is through providing daily opportunities for physical play, especially outdoors.

Self and social development

Being me

Humans are a social species, which means that day to day we have to keep getting the right balance between what we want to do and what we need to do with others.

As children develop, they have the dual task of building a secure sense of self, and of discovering how to be with others and do things collectively. This is not easy, and it does not happen quickly.

We can see development happening most clearly in children's play. Very young babies might seem mostly to be in their own world, but gradually through the first few weeks and months they begin to interact more obviously with their caregivers, exchanging smiles and expressions.
Toddlers will play with us, and often they will play "alongside" each other in what is sometimes called parallel play.

As children develop, they become more and more social, eventually taking part in long play sequences with different roles and shared understandings of rules.

Once again, different aspects of development are interlinked. Babies take a while to work out how to smile, not because they don't want to, but because the muscle movements are complicated. Co-operative play requires executive function and self-regulation.

3.2 What I need from the adults who look after me

The following tables illustrate, in practical terms, what babies and young children need from you in their ELC and early primary settings to help support the development the dimensions described in 3.1.

This has been organised into three tables with the following themes;

- **wellbeing (including self, social, emotional and communication),**
- **movement and coordination,**
- **confidence, creativity and curiosity,**

They are written intentionally from the young child's perspective.

You will see that some of the interactions, experiences and spaces support more than one of these aspects of development.

Note that, throughout this guidance 'the learning environment' does not just refer to the physical environment of settings. It relates to the totality of the **interactions**, **experiences** and **spaces** we provide for babies and young children.

Wellbeing - my self, social, emotional and communication development - some key aspects of what I need from my learning environment

Interactions

From birth → **through my early years of childhood**

- I learn about being me through the way you and others interact with me, look at me, speak to me, treat me and care for me.
- Notice how I show happiness by gurgling or smiling, express my frustration through crying and my stress in my body movements. I need you to help me by responding appropriately. I need you to be patient, calm, consistent and understanding.
- I 'speak' my voice to you through my noises, actions and expressions. I am learning to communicate my thoughts and feelings by responding to others and my environment.
- Notice how I respond to your voice, words and expressions. You help me to learn to communicate and find my words by verbalising what's going on around me.
- Notice how I am beginning to find words to express my thoughts and feelings, but often my emotions are expressed through impulsive actions and gestures. I need you to help me by responding appropriately. I need you to continue to be patient, calm, consistent and understanding.
- Sometimes I am overwhelmed by my emotions. Know when I need to be secure and settled or when I need to be on my own for a short time to find calm and regulate my actions for myself. I need you to be calm and consistent and not annoyed or angry.
- As I am developing my own understanding of who I am know that I'm not yet able to understand and appropriately respond to the thoughts, feelings and intentions of others.
- I need you to encourage my awareness of others and support me and my peers as we play alongside each other and start to play together. Encourage me to be 'socially comfortable' and help me 'read' the messages others may give for example being happy, sad or upset. Help me resolve issues by modelling sharing a toy or giving a hug – but know that I may just not be able and ready to do this yet.
- I learn about self -respect through the way you and others interact with me, look at me, speak to me, treat me and care for me.
- Even as I grow, my emotions are often expressed through impulsive actions and gestures. I need you to help me identify other ways to regulate my emotions...ways that respect my individual physical and emotional needs.
- Sometimes I am overwhelmed by emotions. Help me to know and choose when I need to feel secure and settled or to be on my own for a short time. Help me to know how to find calm and how to regulate my actions for myself. I need you to be calm and consistent and not annoyed or angry.
- Notice how I observe and respond to your voice, words and expressions. You help me to learn to communicate and find my words by modelling empathy. I am learning from you how to be kind, calm and caring.
- I need you to support my developing understanding of the range of emotions that myself and other people experience. With your help I am developing an empathic understanding of the thoughts, feelings and intentions of others.
- I am beginning to develop an awareness of how to work with others when we are playing together. You help me to recognise when others are displaying strong emotions and you encourage me to find ways to relate to and resolve any tensions.

Experiences

From birth → **through my early years of childhood**

- Over time I begin to respond to the routines of my day. Support my routines by noticing how and when I like to play, be fed, changed or settled to sleep.
- I need support and reassurance to cope with changes to my usual routine, for example if I am separated from familiar people or if I move to a new space.
- Respond to my feeding and changing needs in a calm, patient and unhurried way. Such times are key in building a positive, trusting relationship with me. Take time to talk with me and explain what's happening.
- Showing your warmth and compassion is important for me as I grow and learn. Comforting me if I become upset or playing finger-rhymes such as Round and Round the Garden encourage a close emotional bond with me. Your empathy helps me to develop my own.
- I am constantly learning my likes and dislikes and how to communicate these. You help me develop through your responses. Verbalise what's happening. Be with me at my level and take time to notice and observe me to understand me.
- Stories, songs and rhymes with wellbeing themes help me to recognise and understand my needs and that of others.

- I need routines that help me mark the passing of time and give me comfort. I need a balance of different times in my day to play, relax and rest and have nourishment.
- I understand and respond to the routines of my day. I need you to involve me in these routines and develop my sense of ownership and independence.
- I need support and reassurance to cope with changes to my usual routine, for example if I am separated from familiar people or if I move to a new space. Help me learn to feel secure and to regulate my emotions through your empathic manner.
- Respond to my mealtime and personal care needs in a calm, patient, dignified and unhurried way. I am enjoying becoming more independent and learning to ask for help if I need it. Such times are key in building a positive, trusting relationship with me. Take time to talk with me, explain what's happening and encourage my independence.
- I am constantly learning my likes and dislikes and am learning how to communicate these in a thoughtful manner. You are helping me develop this through your kind responses. You and I share ideas and verbalise what's happening and I feel that you notice and understand me.
- Stories, songs and rhymes with wellbeing themes help me to recognise and understand my needs and that of others. You help me to engage in an emotionally empathic way to the feelings of others.

Spaces

From birth → **through my early years of childhood**

- I need spaces where I can relax, feel safe, happy, content and cosy which gives a sense of care and wellbeing.
- I need to experience a variety of spaces; during my day I need the right balance of stimulating and calming indoor and outdoor environments to suit my needs.
- Take me outdoors frequently to help me learn about my wider world. Experiencing fresh-air and being outdoors in different weathers and natural environments develops my understanding of life and benefits my wellbeing.
- I need spaces where my keyworker can see or hear me and quickly respond to my smiles, tears, or gestures, for example, responding to my preferred way of being laid down to sleep.
- Organise my space to be socially comfortable; an uncluttered space to move alongside others and with toys and other materials to reach and explore. Arrange my play space so that I can be with others in a small group.

- I need spaces where I can relax, feel safe, happy, content and cosy and which give a sense of care and wellbeing. These spaces can be accessed independently by me when I feel the need to regulate myself.
- I need to experience stimulating and challenging play spaces outdoors and in.
- Daily outdoor experiences throughout the year help develop my sense of wellbeing and learn about my wider world.
- I continue to need both open spaces to move freely and small spaces to feel calm, contained and cosy.

My movement and coordination development - some key aspects of what I need from my learning environment

Interactions

From birth → **through my early years of childhood**

- Notice how my movements express my feelings and emotions. In many ways they are my voice. Learn the cues I give when I am happy and relaxed or tense and upset. I need you to help me by responding appropriately. I need you to be patient, calm, consistent and understanding.
- Notice how I respond to your physical movements. I often mimic your gestures and movements to help me develop my own.
- Carefully tune into my movement and coordination needs. For example, notice when I need a change of position when I am a baby or supporting and encouraging me to try things for myself as I grow.
- Notice the rhythm in my movements as I grow and develop coordination, for example, as a baby I often move my limbs in a rhythmical way. As I grow notice the patterns in my fine and gross motor skills.
- My physical development and coordination is enhanced through you playing, singing, clapping, and dancing with me.
- Acknowledge that I sometimes will look away from you to help my brain make sense of the information around me.
- I need you to understand and observe that I often repeat movements to make sense of experiences and develop my skills (schemas).

Experiences

From birth → **through my early years of childhood**

- I need to move my body in lots of different ways in order to develop both my fine and gross motor skills.
- Before I am able to crawl help me to be physically active by encouraging me to reach out and use my hands to grasp, kick and move my legs and turn my head.
- Tummy time helps me build the strength I need for sitting and crawling. Do this only for short periods (up to 30 minutes spread throughout the day) when I am awake and alert and you are close to me. Never put me on my tummy to sleep.
- It's important that I don't spend too much time in a baby carrier, buggy, baby seat, walker or bouncer as the over-use of these can delay my physical development.
- Involve me in fun games, songs and rhymes where I stretch out and touch my hands, fingers or toes.
- When I'm able support me to sit to watch others, play with toys or roll over. Encourage me to stretch out for items just out of my reach.
- Give me physical support in response to my efforts to move, especially as I start to pull myself up to stand and try my first steps. Help, encourage and praise me.
- I need to move my body in lots of different ways in order to develop both my fine and gross motor skills.
- I need to have space and time to run, jump, climb, build, crawl, balance, stretch, make. I need to move in and around objects both outside and in. I need to have the choice to do this when I need it to regulate myself.
- I need daily outdoor play experiences to develop my sense of wellbeing and connect me to the world I live in. Outdoor play in different environments encourages me to move my body in different ways.
- I am reassured by the routines of my day. Routines continue to help me mark the passing of time and give me comfort. I need a balance of different times in my day to play and be active, relax and rest and have nourishment. Notice how the processes of the routines of the day provide opportunities for fine and gross motor skill development, for example encouraging me to become independent in dressing in my outdoor clothes.
- Access to resources that encourage open-ended experimentation helps develop my fine and gross motor skills. For example, loose parts play can involve large blocks I need to physically manipulate or small parts I need to carefully select and place on an artwork I am creating.
- Provide me with different resources that encourage my physical development and coordination. Help me develop fundamental skills such as throwing and catching, hopping, skipping, stretching, sliding, balancing and jumping.
- Link my experiences to enhance my learning, for instance consider how music can help encourage me to move.

Spaces

From birth → **through my early years of childhood**

- As I grow I need access to a range of different spaces to move in and around, outdoors and indoors.
- Observe how I use and move in these spaces and respond to my needs in a flexible may, for instance, if I need more space for block play or small spaces where I can feel cosy and secure.
- Being outdoors daily enables me to learn about my wider world and encourages me to move my body in different ways. Experiencing fresh-air and being outdoors in different weathers and natural environments develops my understanding of life and benefits my wellbeing.
- I need large open spaces to move my body freely. I need daily access to spaces where I can practice movements such as running and climbing. Think about my learning spaces in three dimensions.
- I need spaces that encourage me to test my sense of risk. I need you to notice when I need you to step into support my risky play and when you should step back.
- I need spaces to stop, think and relax.

Promoting my confidence, creativity and curiosity - some key aspects of what I need from my learning environment

Interactions

From birth → **through my early years of childhood**

- Seek to understand, and tune in to, what I am exploring – appreciate and respond to what I am learning.
- Sensitively support my efforts to be curious and inquiring without doing it for me.
- Respond to my efforts by understanding how I express my interests, for example, through my facial expression, gazing intensity, movement, noises and sounds.
- Interpret my interests for me by talking gently, for example, *I see what you would like, let me help you reach it*, whilst lifting me up to see higher.
- Be aware that the simplest of experiences for you are often full of potential for me.
- Observe my actions sensitively and intervene when necessary to extend my thinking without over-direction. Try not to interrupt my moments of intense concentration.
- Use techniques such as sustained shared thinking; wondering aloud, explaining what is happening – but all the time allowing me to find out for myself what will happen next.
- Carefully observe my play to know when best to stand back and allow me to try things out – and notice the moments when I'm receptive to more support.
- Use my skills by reminding, sharing and keeping previous accomplishments as a basis for new learning.
- Encourage my confidence, creativity and curiosity by suggesting I try things out and see that this is essential to how I learn.
- Don't be afraid to change your plans and take the lead from what I do and say. Act as a support for me when needed.
- Admit when you don't know! Offer me help by suggesting we find out together – see if this is as valuable for both of us.
- Carefully observe my play to know when best to stand back, give me time, and allow me to investigate for myself – and notice the moments when I'm receptive to more support.
- Encourage my ideas, allow me to make mistakes. Offer me further suggestions and praise my attempts.
- Listen with your eyes. Know that my expressions and movements are a fundamental part of my 'voice'. They articulate my confidence, creativity and curiosity.
- Pose questions which encourage my inquiry, such as, *I wonder why you think that*, to extend my emerging ability to verbalise my thoughts and actions.
- *Say I wonder what happens if...* to help me make sense of what happens when I try things out.
- Help model techniques and strategies with me to encourage this new learning in my new challenges or suggest a new context through introducing a provocation.

Experiences

From birth → **through my early years of childhood**

In all experiences notice and encourage my schematic play - through the process of my repeated actions I am learning about my world and how things work.

- Consider my senses. Provide me with a range of experiences I can see, touch, hear, smell and taste. Talk to me about the sensations I experience and notice how I am responding.
- Encourage my freedom of movement to kick, bounce, roll around and explore with my body.
- Take me outdoors to experience the wonder of nature, for example seeing how things move in the breeze and feeling the sensation of the wind in my face.
- Allow me to get messy and explore and investigate different textures such as painting with my fingers or squelching mud through my toes.
- Provide me with objects and toys that stack, roll and rattle that I can grasp, hold, drop and move.
- Enable my participation in musical experiences by swaying, clapping, bouncing and singing.
- Provide treasure baskets, bags and boxes filled with sensory, real and natural materials to touch and explore.
- Help me understand how things work, for example, how objects can be moved transported around; how similar things can be grouped together, how things balance.
- Provide me with open-ended resources I enjoy such as bags boxes and containers to put smaller items in, to move, to empty out, to scatter about.
- Give me lots of opportunities to mix and combine messy materials.

  Provide me with materials to make clear marks with a variety of tools and equipment, such as crayons, chalks, pencils and paints with different sizes of brush. Provide a selection of paper, neatly arranged to help me see what's available and make choices for myself. Value my efforts through how you talk about, display or help me share my creations with my family.
- Give me experience of everyday activities, splashing in puddles, being blown by the wind, digging holes, making collection of stones or natural objects, or items that I feel are special to me.
- See the potential for wonder and promoting my confidence and independence through everyday routine experiences such as getting ready to go outside or during mealtimes. See what I can already do for myself and give me time to develop these skills.
- Help me recall how I have solved a problem in the past and how this learning links to my current challenge.
- Give me time to find out similarities and differences in different problem solving experiences.
- Create a wealth of interesting situations for me both outdoors and in. Carefully consider the possibilities of the objects available to me each day. How do they provoke my interest and extend my thoughts and learning?
- Incorporate different technologies to enhance my learning experience.
- Afford me daily opportunity to learn from nature and living things both outdoors and in.
- Let me experience how materials change by heating, dissolving, freezing, mixing, etc.
- Provide opportunities to find out how artists, dancers and musicians express their ideas and encourage me to try out my own expressions and interpretations.
- Give me opportunities to learn about music through encouraging me to explore tunes, rhymes, rhythms, timing, pattern.

Spaces

From birth → **through my early years of childhood**

- I need constant and safe spaces, both indoors and outdoors, to explore for myself through my developing movements.
- An unhurried environment allows me time to concentrate on whatever catches my attention without being rushed.
- Carefully consider the resources on offer to me and how they will provoke my senses and encourage my curiosity and creativity.
- Mirrors help me to understand who I am. Notice how I interact with my reflection.
- Daily access to be outside in nature, experiencing all weathers and seasons in comfortable suitable clothing encourages my sense of wonder.
- Point out the features in the world around me and help me access them. For example, hold me up to show me trees and leaves or see birds flying in the sky.
- Bring the outdoors inside for me by ensuring I have access to windows, good lighting and natural objects to touch and explore.
- I need access to a variety of interesting spaces, both indoors and outdoors, filled with open-ended opportunities for me to explore and inquire, for example, the properties of sand, water, clay.
- Carefully consider and review my play spaces. Arrange indoor furniture and outdoor fixtures sensitively in response to my needs and place objects within my reach. Encourage me to share my ideas about the spaces I play and rest in.
- Give me frequent access to resources in which I show interest until I come to a self-satisfying conclusion.
- Mirrors continue to help me to explore who I am - notice how I interact with my reflection.
- Daily access to be outside in nature, experiencing all weathers and seasons in comfortable suitable clothing continues to encourage my sense of wonder.
- Walks and visits extend my curiosity and interest in my immediate world.
- Give me space and time to build, construct and take things apart over and over again.
- Give me opportunities to learn about music and dance through encouraging me to explore tunes, rhymes, rhythms, timing, pattern and movement.

Attachment

The environment of **relationships** within an early years setting is just as important as the physical environment (Mortensen and Barnett, 2015). One way to describe this in in terms of **attachment**. This can be understood as the balance of security, space, and sense of being loved and cherished that children need from us in order to feel safe and cared for and to be able to explore and create for themselves. The terms 'attachment' or 'bonding' are sometimes used interchangeably. From the baby's and the young child's perspective it is the quality of the relationship that matters; the enduring relationship which develops between a child and their caregiver before birth and during the first two years of life. 'Bonding' tends to be used to describe the parent's relationship to the child. Although attachment is significant throughout a child's lifespan, the early attachment process can have a life-long impact on how children deal with change and uncertainty. According to O'Connor, the securely attached child is building up an image of themselves as someone who is 'lovable and well-loved' (2018:5).

To be "mind-minded" is to think of children as having thoughts, feelings and plans that we need to respond to and respect. Babies and children experience this balance; feeling safe, loved and cared for, when the adults around them are being mind-minded and responsive (Meins et al., 2018).

Establishing positive, loving, nurturing and understanding relationships

Babies and children are continuously learning and developing and trying out new things. Young children are learning to self-regulate so any issues a child may express over such situations as following instructions, sharing or managing conflict, are completely developmentally-appropriate. What children learn from these experiences will depend on how we as adults respond. **It is important to remain calm, reflective and mindful in seeing things from the point of view of the child.**

Being **mind-minded** about managing emotions and promoting positive, loving, nurturing relationships in ELC, the early stages of primary school or at home means remembering that babies and young children can be easily overwhelmed by even quite small stressors. For example, just being in an ELC setting can raise the levels of stress hormones for children, because they are in an interesting place with lots of other people. A child's expression of their emotions is the unconscious way in which they tell us that they have an unmet need, and that they can't manage this for themselves.

Also, babies and children do not always have the means to do what they intend. Young children need to have a lot of movement and coordination skills to self-regulate their emotions. Their executive function needs to be strong enough to stop them doing something else. We need to reflect on the language processing demands of the instructions we give children.

So, when children are expressing themselves in ways that we do not expect, or which may cause problems for themselves or others, it is important to step back and reflect on whether they understand what to do, whether they are sufficiently able and practised to do it, and whether strong feelings - driven by needs we can't see - are influencing their emotions.

In any of these situations, children need us to be responsive. A mind-minded response from practitioners, reflecting from the child's point of view, means that the child can use the practitioner's capacity to manage emotions, or to do what is needed, or to understand what is happening (Siegel, 2015). The more we can do this, the more children will be able to use everyday situations to learn how to do it for themselves.

The role of responsive routines

For some babies and children encountering new or different environments can be stressful. Routines help young children feel secure as they come to know what is happening, and what will happen next.

There are two levels of routines that we can reflect on. There are the “small” routines, such as the script we follow for going outside - putting on coats, shoes, etc. Or the way we offer snacks or mealtimes; almost always at the same table with a recognisable routine of serving and tidying. Then are there the big routines, which are the rhythms of the day. We might play for a set time, then read a story, then tidy up.

The details of a routine will vary from setting to setting as these depend on the uniqueness of each setting. In all cases, however, there is a need to balance two things. Firstly, regularity and predictability give security and a sense of safety. However, over-regimenting can have the opposite effect if children’s choices get side-lined, or valuable activities are interrupted because “it is now time for …”

We also have to be aware that children learn routines gradually and at their own pace. We have a role in showing children what to do, supporting and promoting choice, and in explaining what is happening. Some children may not have enough receptive language to cope with this, especially when under stress, so visual and sound prompts can be helpful.

3.3 Schemas

When children repeat patterns of behavior this is known as schematic play. Theorists and educationalists have identified many types of schemas that children will often display. Some children will never appear to be engaged in schematic play while others will have a predominant schema. The skilled practitioner is able to recognise that these distinct patterns of behaviour are meaningful and accommodate opportunities for individual children. For example, children carrying all the bricks from one place to another in a bag; or the sand from the tray to the home corner or pushing a doll around in a pram. This repeated behaviour could be described as 'transporting', one of the examples of schematic play. A child's schema will be evident across a range of different situations. It is important for a practitioner to understand that a child is not being disruptive when engaged in schematic play but be able to recognise this as early learning and help to support the child by offering opportunities to test out their thinking.

Other examples of schema that you may see young children engaged in, include:

- **Trajectory** - a fascination with the horizontal, vertical and diagonal movement of things and self,
- **Enveloping** - an interest in covering and hiding items and themselves Rotational - a preference for things that turn, twist, roll, wind and unwind,
- **Enclosing** - an interest in enclosed spaces, making barricades and borders,
- **Connecting** - joining things together, taking them apart, using string and other materials to put hold things together,
- **Orientation** - experiment by moving objects or themselves around or upside down, they like to view things from different angles.

For more information on schemas, including materials to help parents understand schematic play click here


Why does my child sometimes continually repeat the same actions when they play?
Young children benefit from opportunities to repeat and practise different actions. This helps their brain development and learning.
for example, actions of up and down, going from side to side and rotating supports early writing development.
It's possible your wee one is engaging in what's called...
Schematic Play
this happens when babies, toddlers and young children repeat actions or behaviours to explore the world around them and find out how things work. There are many kinds of
Schemas...
enclosing schema
Children show an interest in enclosed spaces
They construct fences and barricades for themselves or toys
often seen in block play
trajectory schema
"I am discovering how things move"
throwing
running water play
again... again...
chasing
One of the earliest schemas observed in babies... they will often throw food or toys from their pram or highchair.
transporting
in bags
in transporters
schema
Children enjoy repeatedly carrying things around from place to place
connecting schema
Children displaying connecting schema want to join items together...
gluing
threading
construction
rotational schema
twisting
turning
whirling
winding
round and round...
orientation schema
"Seeing things from a different view"
Children like to turn themselves and objects upside-down and back to front to gain different perspectives
enveloping schema
covering
swaddling, hiding, wrapping
Parentzone SCOTLAND
Education Scotland
Foghlam Alba
based on text by Stella Louis

3.4 Doing the right thing for me

How to do the right thing for me

Having an understanding of how early experiences impact on children and young people's development and the importance of relationships in shaping later outcomes is well accepted in Scotland. It is the foundation which underpins much of the Scottish policy landscape and curriculum. Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) recognises that children and young people will have different experiences in their lives, but that every child and young person has the right to expect appropriate support from adults to allow them to grow and develop and reach their full potential.

The Scottish Government's ambition is to make Scotland the best place to grow up. The National Performance Framework (2018) sets out a vision of the country we want to create. It aims to get everyone in Scotland to work together to achieve our national outcomes which include that all children grow up loved, safe and respected so that they realise their full potential.

Find out about the national performance framework here: https://nationalperformance.gov.scot.

You can help me to:

- grow up loved, safe and respected,
- live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe,
- be creative and celebrate my diverse culture,
- have the opportunity to be well educated, skilled and able to contribute to society,
- learn to value, enjoy, protect and enhance their environment,
- be part of a thriving society,
- be healthy and active, and,
- learn to respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination.

GIRFEC is the national approach in Scotland to improving outcomes for children https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/. Promoting and supporting wellbeing is the fundamental basis of the GIRFEC approach. The importance of the contribution that we in ELC and early primary can make to this process cannot be underestimated. We know that early support for those families and children who need it most makes a positive difference. The GIRFEC approach is designed to be flexible enough to support all children and families whatever their need, whenever they need it. It is about responding in a meaningful, supportive way, working with parents and carers wherever possible. It takes into account that everyone involved with the family has an important part to play and puts the wellbeing of children and families at the heart of any support. It puts children's rights and wellbeing of children with services that support them such as ELC settings, schools and the NHS. https://education.gov.scot/parentzone/my-child/what-is-my-child-entitled-to/children-s-rights

A shared resource to access support

Many parents say that when they need help, it's not always easily accessible and they don't know who to go to. A named person is a clear point of contact if a parent wants information or advice, or if they want to talk about any worries and seek support. For children from birth to when they start school, a named person resource is provided by health visitors. When the child enters primary school their named person resource is usually their head teacher. A named person is someone who is available to work in partnership with parents if and when needed, and there is no obligation on parents to use this resource. A lead professional is a resource who can co-ordinate and review support across services including through a Child's Plan.

What does this mean in practice?

As the child's supporting adult, everything you do for young children should promote, support and safeguard their wellbeing. You will have the day to day knowledge of how a child is settling in and progressing. You may also be a first line of contact for the parent or carer. The key to success for the child and family is building professional caring relationships. Your unique role in engaging and involving the child and family is important. If you become aware of a wellbeing need that requires support beyond ELC. It may be appropriate to discuss this with the named person who can connect the family with other services and provide further advice, however it is important to consider the relevant guidance on information sharing when discussing the child's circumstances. If you have a concern about a child's health or safety you must inform social care without delay.

Best practice will;

- put the best interests of the child at the heart of decision making,
- take a holistic approach to the wellbeing of a child,
- work with children, young people and their families on ways to improve wellbeing,
- advocate preventative work and early intervention to support children, young people and their families, and,
- believe professionals must work together in the best interests of the child.

What happens when support is needed ?

Most children and young people get all the help and support they need from their parent(s), wider family and community but sometimes, perhaps unexpectedly, they may need a bit of extra help. The GIRFEC approach is about making that support accessible and responsive to the needs of children and their families; and, preventing any needs, risks or concerns getting worse. It provides a common approach for everyone who works with children, young people and their families.

A shared understanding of wellbeing needs, including planning for children and young people through the GIRFEC approach, is essential to respond to those needs. This makes it easier to work jointly with other organisations and agencies where needed and means that all those working with children and their families across services are using the same language and approach.

There are some circumstances where a child's needs require two or more agencies to work together to deliver services to the child and family. Where this happens, a lead professional will be identified. Where concerns lead to a Child's Plan you may be asked to contribute as a partner to the plan and with your unique knowledge of a the child in your setting, you should feel confident in contributing and talking about the child's wellbeing needs .

In some cases, it will be appropriate for the ELC practitioner to take on the lead professional role. This may feel daunting, but it is important that key staff in the ELC setting understand their roles in relation to the named person and the child's plan and feel confident in contributing and talking about the child's wellbeing needs. We know that intervening early for those children and families who need it most makes a positive difference.

Please use the link below to get more information.

https://www.gov.scot/publications/getting-right-child-understanding-wellbeing-leaflet/pages/1/

To find out more about GIRFEC and how it relates to you and the children and families you work with use the links below.

https://www.gov.scot/publications/shanarri/

https://www.gov.scot/publications/girfec-national-practice-model.

3.5 When things in my life are not straightforward – adversity and trauma

Research suggests that adversity and trauma can have a lifelong impact on mental and physical health and wellbeing. Adversity can come in many forms and can impact each family and child differently. In general terms, exposure to adversity and trauma can mean that children are exposed to higher levels of stress which they can find difficult to manage. We also know that in such circumstances, families may be struggling to provide mind-minded and responsive care and stimulating environments for learning. Sometimes families experience short episodes of adversity and trauma, others may occur over a longer and more sustained period of time. Adversity can impact on whether children have good enough nutrition, sleep and healthcare.

Adverse issues of abuse, neglect, or living in an unstable household with significant problems can cause toxic stress for children. Growing up around adults experiencing drug use, mental health or alcohol problems - or broader issues such as bereavement/loss, bullying, homelessness or violence can have a detrimental effect on children's capacity to learn and develop.

It's also important to realise the impact that may result from poverty related stressors that are outwith the control of many families. Experiencing poverty makes it harder to lessen the impact of childhood adversity and any resulting trauma.

We have a responsibility towards keeping children safe from harm. In every setting and school there is a Safeguarding or Child Protection policy that requires everyone to be knowledgeable and receive annual training about policy and procedures in the event of a situation that requires intervention. If you are unsure what these are in your situation you must seek advice.

Research suggests that **high quality** ELC/school settings can reduce the impact of adversity on children. If children experience consistent, positive relationships from key adults, they are more likely to grow up resilient in their wider world.

Adversity and trauma-implications for ELC and school settings:

- although nearly all parents want to protect children, some forms of adversity can include neglect, abuse, or exposure to violence. All settings are required to take appropriate action to ensure that all children are safe,
- any child and their family may have experienced adversity and trauma, or may do in the future. We need to help prevent difficulties and build resilience for everyone,
- settings can be powerful places for children and families to experience positive relationships, social inclusion and be signposted to sources of help,
- high quality settings provide children with the positive relationships and experiences that can help grow the developmental skills they need for resilience, and,
- approaches that stigmatise groups or individuals, such as issuing questionnaires about personal adverse experiences or seeking to 'score' how many traumatic events are/have been in a child or parent's life are both unethical and counterproductive. It is always helpful for settings to reflect on how they relate to families.

To find out more about Scottish Government's response to Adverse Childhood Experiences:

https://www.gov.scot/publications/adverse-childhood-experiences.

https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-guidance-child-protection-scotland

3.6 When things in my life are not straightforward- additional support for learning

When working with children, it is essential that we start from what a child can do rather than what they can't do. A skilled practitioner will use their knowledge of the individual child's strengths appropriately, to build on small steps of progress.

Lindon (2005), states that even if babies and toddlers do not talk, their behaviours shows they are thinking, planning and using their memory. For example, crawling babies and toddlers remember where their toys are kept. Under twos recall and show you that personal objects belong to a particular person, and very young children show recognition of people and places. This is also the same for older children but the context will be different.

There is no quick fix to issues of communication or emotional behavioural challenges. It is important not to jump to conclusions or think there is an answer to every issue. The most important thing for us to do is to respond to every child in a unique way with respect and build strong relationships as outlined earlier in this section.

Children who have additional support for learning (ASL) needs sometimes require more time and more encouragement to think, to process what is wanted and work through to reach a solution. For example, taking part in snack time or registering when they arrive, both require the child to process information, so they may need extra support.

Occasionally additional support for learning may be required for a child who is demonstrating they are of high ability in a particular aspect of their learning.

Children may have additional needs which require long-term support, whilst others may have shorter-term needs. How these needs impact on an individual child's development and progress in learning will vary from child to child, and this will determine the level and nature of support required. Whilst there are many individual differences and variables in respect of needs and support, prevention and early intervention are essential if children are to be provided with the very best start in life.

To access support we need to ensure that we work with parents from the very start, and make every effort to try to understand their hopes, and concerns. By working together and building on the things children can do, and by recording really accurate observations, we will notice over time the small steps of improvement that children are making. When you and the family feel that additional support is really needed, you need to be able to share your concerns and observations accurately. In most settings, the GIRFEC framework model is the best way to access support from your education authority. For some children it is very obvious they have a specific need – but the process is the same. See the link below. Additional support can help, but also bear in mind, there are a range of third sector organisations in Scotland who are able to offer guidance and will provide helpful information if you contact them.

GIRFEC https://www.gov.scot/publications/girfec-national-practice-model.

3.7 The impact of conscious and unconscious gender bias

Children receive and absorb gender-stereotyped messages about what they can and cannot do according to their sex from a very early age.

For example, toy manufacturers often market more aggressive toys to boys and more passive toys to girls, such as construction activities to boys and creative ones to girls. In picture books, women and girls are often portrayed as performing more domestic tasks while men are largely under-represented as parents. These stereotypes are unhelpful for all children.

By the time children enter ELC settings they may already be developing gender based expectations of behaviours, academic preferences and perceived abilities. These stereotypical views can shape their attitudes to relationships, participation in the world of work and affect their wellbeing. A narrowing of experiences at this stage too often evolves into a narrowing of opportunities later in life. For example, by secondary school, boys tend to lag behind girls in literacy and language skills, and girls are still under-represented in physics, technology and engineering.

Although the problem is multifaceted, we in ELC and early primary have an important role to play in challenging these views before they become too ingrained. While children should not be coerced into any activity, adopting the attitude that children are able to choose whatever they want for themselves will not counteract the problem. Many children self-select certain activities based on their observations of what is appropriate for them.

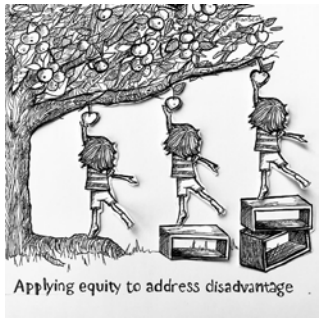
It is crucial that children are given the opportunity and encouragement to access all areas of the curriculum from this early stage so they have equality of opportunity in the future. We are expert in focusing on the needs of an individual child and being child-led.

We all have unconscious biases, and it's important to be aware of these in our interactions with babies and young children. They affect the ways we interact differently with girls and boys, the assumptions we make and the advice and directions we give them. Although admitting and dealing with your own biases can be challenging, it is essential to identify, reflect on, and discuss them openly with colleagues.

The above text was adapted from the Education Scotland, Skills Development Scotland and the Institute for Physics resource https://education.gov.scot/improvement/documents/sci38-elcc-action-guide.pdf

The Care Inspectorate, in collaboration with Zero Tolerance, have produced a resource for ELC settings on Gender Equal Play https://hub.careinspectorate.com/media/3466/gender-equal-play-in-early-learning-and-childcare.pdf

What do we mean by equity?



3.8 An important note about being you...

Working with and for babies and young children is extremely rewarding – but can be very demanding of us physically, cognitively and – sometimes - emotionally.

To give our youngest the best we must strive to be at our best. And to do this it's important for us as a workforce to look after ourselves and each other.

Kindness and self-care are vital.

Section 4: Child's work: the importance of play

4.1 The importance of play

> ...play at this time is not trivial, it is highly serious and of deep significance
>
> **(Froebel, 1826)**

Play is an intrinsic part of human nature and development. For babies and children, the essential role of play is **well documented**. Through play a child develops their cognitive, social, emotional and physical capacities.

Froebel's quote above continues to resonate today. Froebel created the concept of the 'kindergarten' based on recognising the extent of young children's abilities and possibilities. He argued that play is the highest form of human development. He advocated that young children need adults who are flexible and responsive to their needs. Adults who both recognise the importance of play and can understand and use their knowledge of the child in which to base their practice.

We know how important it is for children to be given time to play throughout the day to follow their own line of enquiry or individual interest. Play is often thought of as children's work (Isaacs, 1930) and anyone observing children absorbed in play can see how hard they work.

But play is not simple.

Play can be and mean many different things to children and adults. We may describe activities we plan as 'play' whereas a child may not see these as play at all. 'Play' is therefore both a tricky word and concept to describe. It can be fun and joyful or difficult and complicated. This is a challenge for us as the act can be misinterpreted as being 'just play'. The intrinsic value of what a child is actually doing and learning can be missed or ignored and therefore seen as less valuable. We also may consciously or unconsciously place more value on tasks we plan and lead with pre-determined outcomes.

Another challenge for us is to go beyond the word 'play' and consider how play and learning are associated. Pramling-Samuelsson (2010) suggests they are not the same but are closely related. She stresses the importance of a 'play-based curriculum' for the playing learning child.

Through play, the child can learn to answer their own questions, learn new skills and learn to work collaboratively with other children or adults. Whitebread (2012) tells us about two areas in particular where the evidence about the benefits of play is strong. Firstly, early language development through imaginative play either with another adult or with other children, and secondly, through play the child's ability to self-regulate is enhanced.

Some theorists emphasise that when playing, the child tries out ideas and comes to a better understanding of thoughts and concepts; others see play as a means of the child coping with reality through using their imagination; and, others see play as a means to practise new skills. All of which are valid.

Play is evident in Scottish education policy and curriculum guidance. In June 2013, the Scottish Government published the first National Strategy for play. https://www.gov.scot/resource/0042/00425722.pdf/ The strategy suggests 'play encompasses children's behaviour which is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. It is performed for no external goal or reward and is a fundamental and integral part of healthy development which seeks to improve play experiences for all children.'

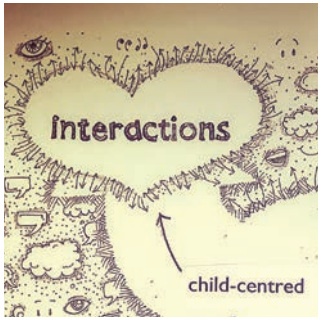
Curriculum for Excellence (2007) gives prominence to play, particularly across the early level and the transition between ELC and primary school. **This transition will likely be smoother for the child if play remains and continues as the main vehicle for their early learning in P1 and beyond.** As practitioners across ELC settings and schools we need to work together to plan for progression in learning and for continuity across a child-centred play pedagogy and curriculum.

Every learning environment, in terms of **interactions, experiences** and **spaces** - both outside and indoors - tells a story about how play is valued. The learning environment in the early stages of primary school should not look or feel starkly different from a motivating ELC environment. The level of provocation might be greater, the interaction might be more challenging, and the experiences on offer might be different, but the school environment should be conducive to learning through play.

One of the many challenges we face when considering play pedagogy in early stages of school is the pressure we can face from external forces or our own beliefs and values to evidence the child's progress in key aspects of their learning. While important, this should not deter us from adopting pedagogical approaches which embrace play as the medium through which young children learn best.

For play pedagogy to be effective, research has shown that a **clear rationale** and **shared understanding of the value of play** is essential. This rationale and shared understanding should emanate from the child's needs.

We need to consider our own beliefs and attitudes to play, learn about different pedagogical approaches and seek to understand the nature of play in today's world. We must consider the implications of the children in our ELC and school settings not having the same experience and quality of play as previous generations; especially outdoor and free play.



Child-centred play pedagogy starts from the children

Child-centred play pedagogy requires us to take the lead from the children. This approach actively responds to the individual and constantly changing needs of a young child. A young child's voice is interpreted by our observations of their **actions**, **emotions** and **words**. These observations are central to assessment and inform us what children need.

"What do the children's **actions**, **emotions** and **words** tell you about what they require from you and others [their **interactions**], their **experiences**, and the different **spaces** they need to grow and develop **in every way**?"

Enabling play pedagogy is a skilful job. **Interactions** are central and key to successful play pedagogy.

Consider how useful or **affording** the experiences are outside and inside the setting. To do this, ask yourself, can and do the children use the experiences they have on offer in different ways to test and explore their theories? Has both intentional and responsive planning for continuity and progression using Curriculum for Excellence Early Level been considered? Collaboration with the children, parents, other members of staff and the consideration of opportunities in the wider community ensures a play provision which is relevant, challenging and exciting.

Thought needs to be given to the opportunities that different learning **spaces** provide. Use creative solutions to provide a variety of spaces for the children. Observe how the children use and interact with the outdoor and indoor spaces available and respond to their **actions**.

4.2 Play pedagogy

Pedagogy is a word that is in everyday use now, but do we all have a clear and shared understanding of what it really means? And how do we use that understanding to implement play approaches in our settings? Stewart and Pugh define pedagogy as 'the understanding of how children learn and develop, and the practices through which we can enhance that process (2007:9). This definition is rooted in the values and beliefs about what we want for children, supported by knowledge of the child backed up by what we know about early childhood development and our experience as practitioners.

In defining the term, **pedagogy**, there remains the challenge of the different styles of practice. As we know children moving from an ELC setting to school may have fewer opportunities to play, to choose what they want to play with and when. Children may spend more time sitting listening and following instruction.

Achieving a consistent pedagogical approach across the ELC sector and the early primary stages should be a key aspiration. Regular planning discussions between practitioners across both sectors and with children themselves would help to improve continuity of experience and learning. Moyles (2015) argues play pedagogy values children's contributions to their own learning and offers opportunities for children to take ownership of their learning.

4.3 Play pedagogy from the beginning of ELC and beyond

As previously mentioned, designing learning environments requires consideration of the **interactions**, **experiences** and **spaces** on offer. Physical spaces, both outside and indoors, should be constantly reviewed to incorporate a wide range of responsive, familiar, and exciting new play opportunities. Notice how the children interact with their environment and respond to their interests and use of their spaces.

To support cognitive development the learning environment should be rich in opportunities for children to engage with concepts and foster skills for learning, such as reasoning, creativity and problem solving. The choice of experiences on offer should reflect an environment of open-ended possibilities in which children can feel intrinsically motivated to explore and investigate through play - including taking calculated risks and learning from mistakes.

In ELC and beyond into school, the social environment of interactions should provide children with opportunities to continue to develop positive relationships with others; while also supporting and developing an understanding of the notion of boundaries; self-regulation, negotiation and choice. As the complexity of the child's play develops, learning should be facilitated through a cyclical process of responsive and intentional planning, which includes **observations, interpretation and documentation of learning, responsive and intentional planning** and **facilitation**.

child-centred pedagogy in practice

observation, interpretation and documentation of learning

'Listen with your eyes and ears'

What does the child's **actions**, **emotions** and **words** tell you about their development and learning?

Are your methods of documentation informative and meaningful to **you**, **the child**, **their family** and **other practitioners**?

responsive and intentional planning

Informed by the child's **actions**, **emotions** and **words**

What needs to **stay** to reinforce development and learning?

What needs to **change** to inspire new learning and development?

facilitation

Sensitive interactions -
honing the skill of stepping in and stepping back

Flexible experiences -
learn from the child to inform practice

Variety of spaces -
outdoors and inside

The experiences and spaces for play we facilitate for the children should reflect the children's ideas, aspirations, curiosities and next steps in their learning. It is through play that children learn about themselves and make sense of the world around them.

The use of play pedagogies to support learning across the early level provides continuity in children's learning as they transition from ELC to school. In school, play pedagogies should be planned to meet the diverse range of children's needs, acknowledging that most children start school as competent learners, while still needing opportunities to discover, to investigate and to be creative learners through play. When organising play pedagogies, consideration should be given to the child's physical, social and cultural experiences and how these factors impact on children's development of lifelong skills and capacities.

Developing the right balance between **child-initiated, adult initiated** and **adult-directed experiences**, will depend on the uniqueness of the needs of each setting's children and wider contexts; including the cultural environment in which children learn and play.

4.4 The role of the adult in supporting learning

We need to value play and take time to observe the child's learning through play in order to deepen or extend their learning.

Stepping back and noticing what the children are involved in is a skill that must be embedded into practice both in ELC and school settings. After reflecting on the key learning for the child we can facilitate a provocation or response to allow the child to further pursue their own thinking. The provocation/response allows further time for us to capture what the child's thinking is prior to interacting with them and then developing a plan for building or extending the child's thinking.

Materials should be open ended to develop children's creativity. A simple reorganisation of the resources available might be all that is needed to raise the children's curiosity. For example, if we place a range of boxes near the construction area children will automatically build something, but if we place a range of boxes near the art area, children might decorate and change the function of the boxes through adding paint, paper or graphics.

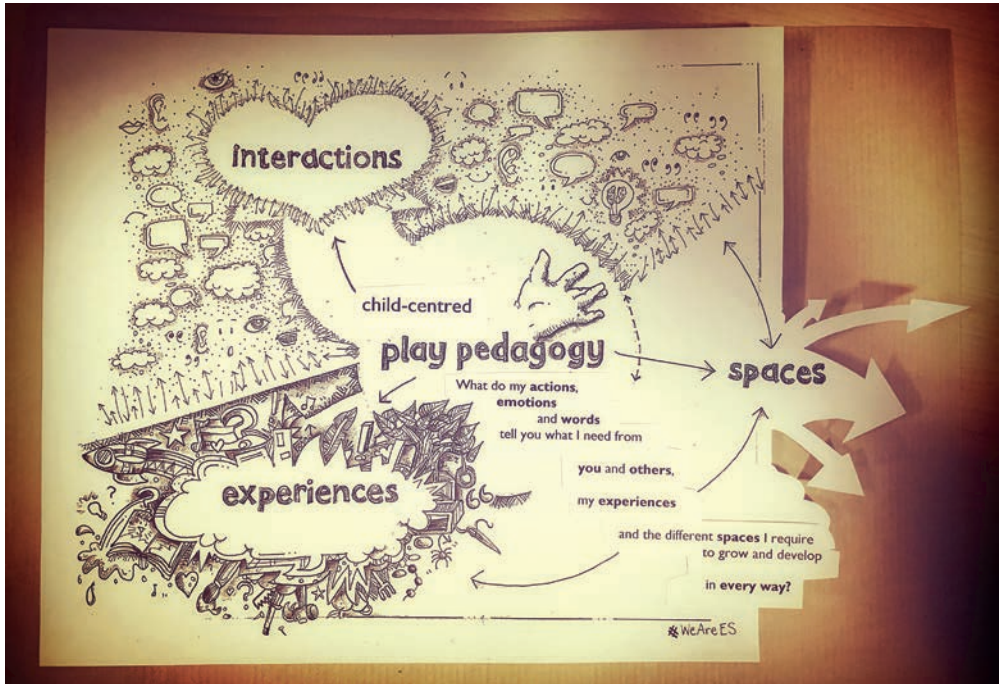
The role of the adult is a delicate balance of supporting, enriching and proposing on the one hand, and keeping back to give the children space and time to build their own ideas on the other. Barbara Rogoff (2003) describes learning as a co-operative process between children and adults, where children 'borrow' adult knowledge and skills, and at any given moment the lead and responsibility passes back and forth. From the adult's point of view, one can imagine this as a 'ladder' that they can go up and down, always aware of the child's interest and initiative.

Conversations around observations of play need to feature regularly in team meetings and during professional training or collegiate moderation opportunities. Photographs taken or short videos of the children playing within the setting can be used to support these conversations. These also provide meaningful documentation opportunities for the children to revisit their experiences.

Observation can therefore be seen as noticing what it is that the children are finding interesting; noticing what they do and seeing how this might be changing over time. **It is impossible to design a progression or tracker for everything a child might do or find interesting**, and for babies and toddlers this might feel very adult-centred and unnatural. But we can notice interest and, as adults, think about how we can make something even 'more interesting'.

Some practitioners find The Leuven's Wellbeing and Involvement scales, developed by Dr Ferre Laevers and a team based at the Research Centre for Experiential Education at Leuven University (Belgium), a useful tool in evaluating the quality of their facilitation of play pedagogy: http://web.plymouth.gov.uk/documents-ldtoolkitleuven.pdf

For further help and advice see Education Scotland's Play Pedagogy Toolkit, available on the National Improvement Hub.



Section 5: Early childhood curriculum and pedagogical leadership

5.1 What is the early childhood curriculum?

The early childhood curriculum is holistic. It values children, recognising them as full of potential from birth. Our role in developing a flexible, enabling and creative child-centred curriculum is to be responsive to the uniqueness of each child, their family and the context of the community in which they live.

The world in which we live expects our children to be competent, capable individuals who learn and achieve well. Families are central to the child's learning at home and in their community, to their acquisition of skills, capacities and attributes. Therefore, it is essential that as practitioners we develop strong links with parents in shaping the curriculum. Strong collaboration between practitioners, teachers and partners is also important in designing a continuous curriculum experience for babies and children as they journey from one phase of their education and care to another.

We know **how** babies and children learn best. They learn best in an environment of quality **interactions**, interesting **spaces** and when the **experiences** on offer are set in meaningful contexts. They learn best in environments that inspire them to be curious and creative.

The early childhood curriculum is also about **what** the child wants to learn within a caring, nurturing environment. While the intentional promotion of specific experiences and interactions are important for young children to learn, so too is a curriculum which values and upholds the rights of the child. The right to a relevant, coherent and child-centred curriculum which recognises and intends to build on **what** the child already knows. These intentions must be supported by high quality interactions and warm caring relationships. Relationships which are well judged and focussed on extending and deepening children's skills as lifelong learners.

In the book "The Child's Curriculum: working with the natural values of young children", the authors suggest the principles of early childhood and care are advanced in a curriculum which; gives professional and expert attention to children's developing sense of self and how their actions influence the world around them (which could be described as their **agency**), and interests.

> "Where guided pedagogy supports children's interests and curiosity for learning. And, the recognition that meaningful social relationships and involvement of parents and community in the child's learning are promoted to bring about long-term economic and health benefits."
>
> **(Trevarthen et al., 2018: 314)**

We know from research and practice that the learning experiences provided in the earliest months and years in the child's life are so critical for their future success in life. As already mentioned, the early childhood curriculum experiences that practitioners provide for our very youngest should continue to be based on the four interrelated and interdependent principles of the Rights of the Child, Relationships, Responsive Care and Respect.

In Scotland, we have the benefit of curriculum guidance which spans both the ELC sector and the early stages of primary school. Curriculum for Excellence 'early level' is intended to support the implementation of a responsive, continuous play-based curriculum for children aged three to six. It is important then that practitioners and teachers provide, through responsive and intentional planning, a blend of child-initiated and adult-initiated learning experiences. The emphasis should be on child-centred play pedagogy to ensure continuity in children's curriculum experiences.

The refreshed narrative for Curriculum for Excellence places learners at the heart of their education. It provides a succinct single framework for practitioners. Fundamental to the refreshed narrative is the focus on the four capacities so that children can become confident individuals, effective contributors, successful learners, and responsible citizens. You can find the refreshed narrative for Curriculum for Excellence which shows the four capacities in more depth at https://scotlandscurriculum.scot.

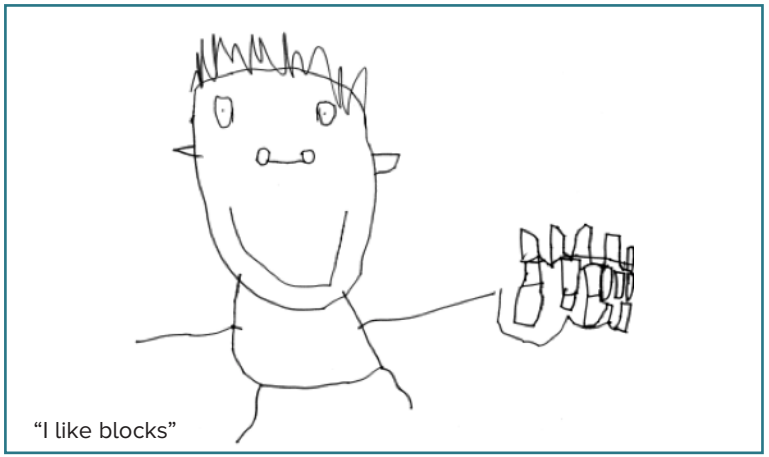
The capacities reflect and recognise the lifelong nature of education and learning. We have a responsibility to equip our children with the skills, attributes and dispositions for a future in an ever changing world. We need to consider how we can support children to develop these core competencies. From a very early age children are capable of leading their own learning. As pedagogical leaders, it is our responsibility to recognise this and give children opportunities to influence **how** and **what** they want to learn. In understanding each child as an individual, by being responsive to their interests and knowing how they learn, we can turn our curriculum aims and practice into a unique and meaningful curriculum experience for the children we have in our settings.

5.2 What do we mean by pedagogy and pedagogical leadership?

As previously explored 'pedagogy' is what we know about children and how they learn, together with the experiences and responses we provide, the curriculum. It describes our methodology and our understanding and beliefs of what is right for young children. In determining the nature of our pedagogy, we need to consider the child, the experiences we provide, our interactions, the spaces, the family and their community and how these factors influence each child's holistic development and progress in learning.

It is important then that practitioners understand and develop a 'shared pedagogy'. Having a shared understanding of pedagogy will enable practitioners to provide appropriate support, at a suitably challenging pace for each baby and child.

In her book, 'Successful Leadership in the Early Years' June O'Sullivan describes a pedagogical leader as 'someone who understands how children learn and develop and makes this happen' https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/successful-leadership-in-the-early-years-9781472919052/ This should be the focus for every practitioner as a leader of learning in every ELC setting and school.


"I like blocks"

Pedagogical leadership will vary from setting to setting in response to the different social, political and cultural contexts in which we work. Our pedagogical practice will be influenced by our understanding of different educational theorists who have over the years helped to inform our early years pedagogy and practice.

A major contribution to our understanding of how children learn is Bruner's (1971) theory of learning. Bruner contends that babies and children learn by revisiting skills they gain through discovery and exploration with the help of a known adult or competent peer. We know now that babies and children learn best when the curriculum activities on offer are set within a meaningful context which builds on what the child already knows, can do and is interested in.

5.3 Considering the learning environment

The learning environment, in terms of **interactions, experiences** and **spaces** both outside and in, must be carefully considered to support children's learning. We need to be able to view the environment through the eyes of the children we are working with and ask ourselves:

- What does this environment for play look and feel like to a baby, a toddler, a young child?
- Is the environment interesting? Motivating? Can babies/children access and return resources independently?
- Are there opportunities for them to develop their physical, cognitive, imaginative and creative skills?

It is important that we provide meaningful and rich contexts and opportunities for children to develop a wide range of skills such as early literacy and numeracy. We do this by bringing our training and knowledge of child development, and understanding of how to support young children's learning, actively into our practice as early years educators. This should be seen as a lifelong learning journey for us. We should constantly aim to discover what we ask questions about; such as, 'how best can I support a child's science, technology, engineering and mathematical (STEM) learning?', through continuous professional development. We should seek opportunities to learn from each other, and continually ask ourselves 'why are we doing things this way – is this the best way for our children and families?'.

As pedagogical leaders we should know the purpose and possibilities of the materials we provide outdoors and indoors. It is essential that we regularly evaluate how children are using the spaces within the environment and make changes and additions when required. Children should be involved in developing and caring for their environment. By involving children fully in planning their learning they will begin to understand the importance of caring for their environment and resources.

The unique role of outdoor play

It is undeniable that daily, high quality outdoor play experiences have a direct and positive impact on children's physical, cognitive, social, mental health and emotional development. Outdoor learning is one of three pillars of Learning for Sustainability, the others being global citizenship and education for sustainable development. As previously mentioned, the direct link between a child's movement and coordination development and the development of fine motor and concentration skills must be made, valued - and demonstrated in practice - by us as early years educators.

Research indicates a marked decline in children's outdoor play behaviours. The Active Healthy Kids Scotland Report Card 2018 details concerns over the significant amount of time Scottish children are spending indoors engaging in sedentary activities.[7] The report contrasts this with the opportunities present through the array of natural outdoor environments and parks easily accessible to over 90% of communities in Scotland. The benefits of 'risky play' outdoors include helping children to build resilience, to manage risk and to know their limits.

As many young children will be spending an increased number of hours in ELC there is a need for all settings to consider the quality and frequency of their outdoor play provision as a priority. This is important, not only as part of a holistic curriculum to meet a child's immediate developmental and learning needs, but also to ensure a wider cultural change to improve the physical and mental health of our children and families in the future.

Many settings already make good use of access to the outdoors, not only through their immediate outdoor space but also through ensuring access to their local woodlands, glens, parks and green spaces. This regular contact with nature can engender an appreciation and respect for biodiversity. It can also connects them to their local community and sense of place, helping them to develop as responsible citizens committed to sustainability.

Time spent outdoors on a daily basis benefits both children and practitioners. It is important that both are equipped with appropriate clothing and footwear to ensure comfort and protection no matter the weather. The act of changing in and out of outdoor clothing should be considered as a rich learning opportunity in itself. Children should be positively encouraged and supported to develop the problem solving and fine and gross motor skills needed to self-select clothing and footwear and dress themselves. Children often need gentle guidance, time and patience from practitioners to ensure this is successful and stress-free.

7 https://www.activehealthykidsscotland.co.uk/files/2018/11/AHKSRC_short_form.pdf

Even the most uninspiring outdoor spaces can be transformed into a rich play environment creatively and inexpensively through the provision of loose parts play.[8] Instead of focusing on recreating indoor play areas outdoors, reflect upon the unique opportunities outdoor play affords for big movement and dynamic play. For instance, consider how fresh air, natural materials, and areas for digging, growing and splashing in puddles can contribute to a child's learning and development in ways that could never be achieved indoors.

Children flourish when playing outdoors in all weathers. Feeling sun, wind, rain, snow and ice first hand is important as it connects us as human beings to the planet we live on. Being in nature stimulates the senses and nurtures a sense of wonder and awe at the processes of life. Outdoor environments can offer different surfaces, different levels, lots of natural features to explore, trees to climb, and bushes and shrubs to hide and build dens in. Different natural spaces can simultaneously ignite creativity and imagination whilst fostering a sense of wellbeing and calm. Advice from the Chief Medical Officer suggests that children under five should have 180 minutes of physical activity every day and that should include outdoor play.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/832868/uk-chief-medical-officers-physical-activity-guidelines.pdf

Careful consideration should be given to how children can access a setting's outdoor environment. If a setting is fortunate to have direct access outdoors from a playroom or classroom then careful consideration should be given to the comfort of the children and practitioners still indoors when an external door is left open. If direct outdoor access to play is not possible think about how you can provide children with daily outdoor play opportunities.

8 http://www.playscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/loose-parts-play-toolkit.pdf

Settings should offer flexibility and an appropriate balance of time between indoor and outdoor environments. To ensure this flexibility, we are required to be reflective, solution-focused and continually evaluating our pedagogical practice.

For more information on the Care Inspectorate's advice on outdoor experiences click on this link: https://www.careinspectorate.com/images/documents/3091/My_world_outdoors_-_early_years_good_practice_2016.pdf

Inspiring Scotland, the Scottish Government and Care Inspectorate's Out to Play guidance can be accessed here: https://www.playscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/Out-to-Play_practical-guidance-for-creating-outdoor-play-experiences-in-early-learning-and-childcare.pdf

For more information on outdoor learning in the context of Learning for Sustainability visit Education Scotland's National Improvement Hub: https://education.gov.scot/improvement/learning-resources/a-summary-of-learning-for-sustainability-resources/

Further information on Scotland's Outdoor Play and Learning Position Statement can be found here: https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/publication/scotlands-coalition-outdoor-play-learning-position-statement/

The significance of snack and mealtimes to learning and development

Routines such as meal times, rest times and personal hygiene should be viewed as learning opportunities where we take time to support and encourage children to learn necessary skills for life.

It may appear obvious to say that snack and mealtimes offer the opportunity for so much more than simply meeting a baby or young child's nutritional needs. But managing the logistics of the planning, preparation and service delivery of food can overshadow many of the special and unique learning benefits that sharing a meal together provides.

For instance, eating together affords the chance for children to develop language and communication skills in a meaningful social context. From a very young age babies and children learn turn-taking and the importance of eye contact and gesture in communicating needs and wants. Young children practise sharing, and become aware of each other's personal space and points of view; skills crucial to effective communication.

The processes involved in mealtime preparation also provide opportunities for rich learning. Often friendships are made and conflicts are resolved over a meal, and respect and responsibility is nurtured through the processes involved with setting up, eating and clearing away afterwards. Even if the meals are prepared offsite, practitioners can use the daily menu as a stimulus for learning in many ways.

As children explore both new and familiar taste experiences they are discovering their personal likes and dislikes, and how to express these.

Encouraging independence at snack and mealtimes can require patience and lots of positive encouragement and reinforcement.

For us, snack and mealtimes provide a unique opportunity to get to know children better. Taking the time to enjoy feeding a baby or sitting with young children while they eat is both insightful and joyful. It is essential to find effective ways of communicating these moments with parents and work together to make snack and mealtimes happy experiences children look forward to each day both at home and in their ELC settings and school.

It is important to engage with parents around understanding a child's eating habits. Parents should feel involved in the process, especially as they may be anxious about their child's mealtimes in the setting. Practitioners need to remain solution-focused to ensure any potential issues can be tackled in a supportive and informed manner. For instance, talking to parents about their child's preferences and seeking to understand and reassure both child and parent if snack or mealtimes are a source of stress.

Snack and mealtimes provide clear structure and rhythm to the day. Such times are of particular importance to children as they mark the passing of time in a predictable and reassuring way.

Setting the Table – NHS nutritional guidance and food standards for early years childcare providers in Scotland is a guidance publication for food provision in early years childcare provision:
http://www.healthscotland.com/uploads/documents/30341-Setting%20the%20Table.pdf

For more information on the Care Inspectorate's advice on mealtimes 'Food Matters' click on this link:
https://hub.careinspectorate.com/how-we-support-improvement/care-inspectorate-programmes-and-publications/food-matters/

5.4 Leading through learning together with families

Parents and carers know and understand their child best. As the child's first educators, parents and carers are key partners in supporting their child's learning. As pedagogical leaders, it is essential that we develop positive relationships with parents and carers and work closely alongside them and value their contribution. Understanding the complexities, diversities and cultural differences of individual families and how this can impact each child is essential. The conversations we have with each family form the foundations of our relationships with them. During these conversations it is essential that we respect, understand and empathise to ensure our relationships are built on trust.

There are three main aspects to consider, **parental involvement, parental engagement** and **family learning**.

What is parental involvement?

Parental involvement describes the ways in which parents can get involved in the life and work of the ELC or school setting. Parental involvement includes activities such as parental representation in the development of the vision, policies or improvement plans of the setting and other key decisions.

What is parental engagement?

Parental engagement is about parents' and families' interaction with their child's learning. It can take place at home, in the setting or in the community. Where it takes place is not important. The important thing is the quality of the parent's engagement with their child's learning, the positive impact that it can have and the interaction and mutual development that can occur as a result of that interaction. An example of this would be working in partnership with parents in the creation and review of their child's personal plan in ELC. It is important that the child and their parents or carers are recognised as experts in their own experiences.

What is family learning?

Family learning encourages family members to learn together as a family, with a focus on intergenerational learning. Family learning activities can also be specifically designed to enable parents to learn how to support their children's learning.

Family learning is a partnership approach which can lead to positive outcomes for both adults and children. It can be used as an early intervention and prevention approach which reaches the most disadvantaged communities. Family learning helps close the attainment gap through breaking inter-generational cycles of deprivation and low attainment. The effects of family learning are known to extend beyond the duration of the intervention and provide lasting impacts and improved outcomes (Family Learning Review, 2016).

Partnership working is a key theme of working and extends beyond the family to local services within the community. It is crucial to understand the local context that the family and your setting is in.

The planning of family learning programmes and engagement with families are interlinked and do not happen in isolation. Practitioners and parents can work together to identify potential barriers to participation - such as transport, childcare availability, parental working hours and rural locations - and consider how these can be addressed. There are a range of key characteristics in the Family Learning Framework (2018) that are helpful for practitioners to consider and help ensure the maximum impact on outcomes for families.

ELC settings should continually review their family learning strategy in partnership with their families and partners. Practitioners who engage with parents and carers and who are planning to take family learning forward in their setting should refer the key documents mentioned above and the Education Scotland Engaging Parents and Families Toolkit (2019).

You may also find it useful to work through the national online CPL module on building confidence in engaging with parents/carers, which can be found on the SSSC website.

Section 6: Putting pedagogy into practice

6.1 Putting pedagogy into practice

This section offers practical guidance on how to put pedagogy into practice. It discusses how to provide meaningful learning environments; spaces filled with considered interactions and experiences starting with the children themselves. Julie Fisher stresses that

> starting with the child' should not be an 'empty mantra
>
> **(2013)**

By identifying more closely **what we want children to learn** and **how best children learn** we can enhance the range of learning opportunities and try to ensure that, whatever setting children attend, they have an equal access to broad and balanced learning experiences.

Children learn and develop at different rates personal to themselves. They are continually trying to make sense of the world around them. Children learn best when they are active, busy learners. It could be said that they are learning all of the time from all of their experiences.

In essence, this is their curriculum.

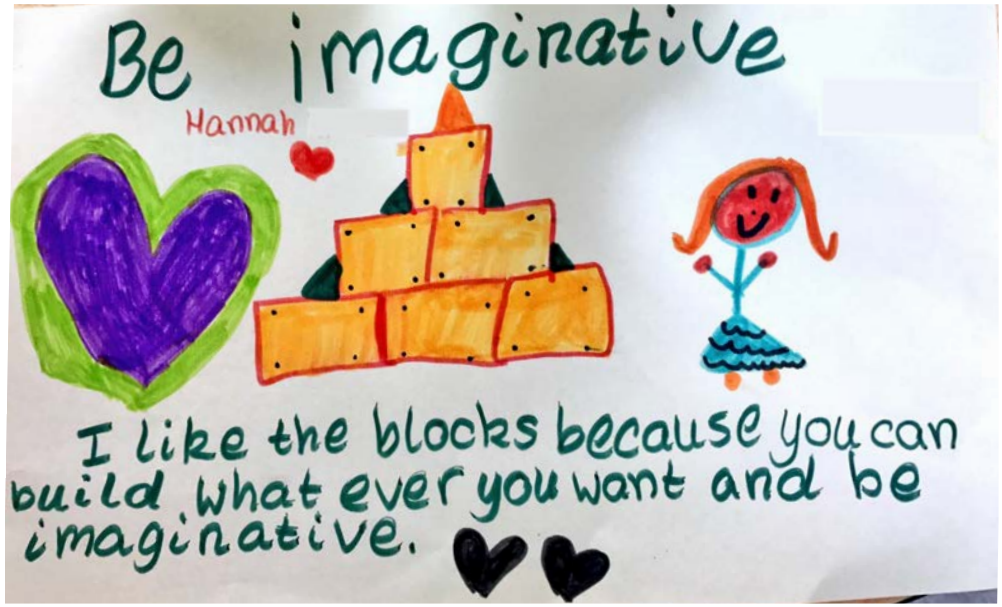
On the other hand, the curriculum is also about what the practitioner wants children to learn within a warm, caring, nurturing environment – the intentional promotion of experiences and interactions which are important for young children to learn.

These intentions must be supported by the interactions and experiences surrounding the child in affording outdoor and indoor spaces.

In the book Children's Rights and Early Education (1996), Nutbrown talks about the curriculum in this way:

> What makes working with young children so exciting is the way the anticipated possibilities planned and provided for by the educator are used by individual and groups of children in spontaneous and dynamic ways. The people, children, parents and educators, who share the experiences construct the curriculum.

This explanation helps us appreciate that pedagogy is about the interactions and experiences which support the curriculum and the process of how children learn. This is inseparable from what young children should learn – the content of the curriculum.



6.2 Responsive and intentional learning

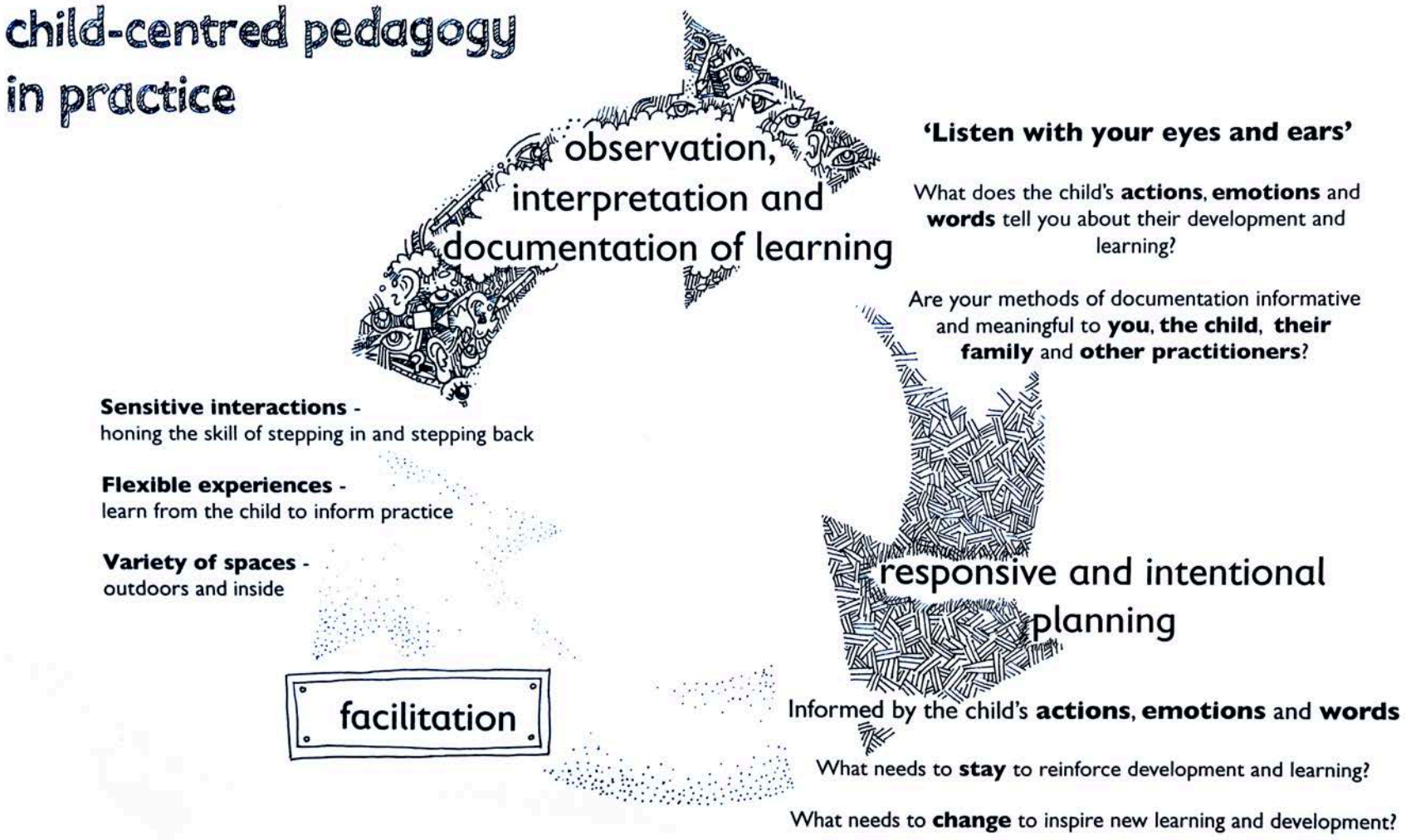
We provide both **responsive** and **intentional** learning for children in our day-to-day practice. By this we mean that we constantly respond to the needs of young children alongside planning and implementing intentional experiences to help them develop their skills, knowledge and understanding of the world around them. Responsive and intentional planning approaches start with our observations and interpretations of the baby or young child's actions, emotions and words. This tells us what the child needs for us to provide in their learning environment. A child-centred approach to planning learning will help the child connect each new discovery to what they already know.

We have a key role to play in providing motivating learning provocations and appropriate challenge. Our richer knowledge of the world helps young children to make progress in their learning. This is what Bruner meant by "scaffolding". Children and practitioners working together can take learning further than the child could by themselves (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009).

Mind-minded approaches to development and learning have implications for how we observe children and how we plan sessions. Observations are key in getting to know each baby and child as a person, recognising the things they like to do and what might interest them next. A balance of responsive planning and intentional planning is essential in providing suitable experiences that connect with and extend children's interests and motivations.

Let's look again at our 'child centred pedagogy in practice' cycle:

Observations and following the interests of the child



In observing children, we can easily see developmental differences in how they explore and interact with the world around them. Babies often explore objects, such as a cloth book by putting it into their mouth, while a toddler might begin to turn some pages. Across the room, a young child is “reading” to a friend.

We know it is important for settings to offer children interactions, experiences and spaces that are developmentally appropriate.

One way to do this is to consult a list of typical milestones for given ages and stages and provide what might match these. An approach like this can take us so far, but of course every child is different, and we have to take care to ensure that we do not miss some opportunities to support and extend their learning. This approach can also encourage a narrow ‘tick box’ focus that doesn’t represent the repetitive and schematic nature of a young child’s learning – young children often need to repeat experiences and actions to deepen their learning.

In a considered responsive and intentional learning environment children will find interesting things to do that match their current needs. Child development is partly driven from within the child, the brain will use the environment of interactions, experiences and spaces to find what it needs to develop.

By following a child’s interests and motivations we will almost always be on the right “level”. It also means we can bring different age groups together. For example, a toddler will enjoy exploring a pile of leaves outside for texture and feel, while a young child might be starting to talk about their colours or numbers. Both might wonder, in different ways, how the leaves on the ground relate to the leaves still on the tree. Both will learn from each other’s actions, emotions and words and the way we interact with them too.

Observation can therefore be seen as noticing and trying to interpret what the child’s actions, emotions and words mean in terms of what they are learning. We can observe what they are mastering and what they still need help, guidance and practice with. Our role includes noticing what the child does and how this might be changing over time.

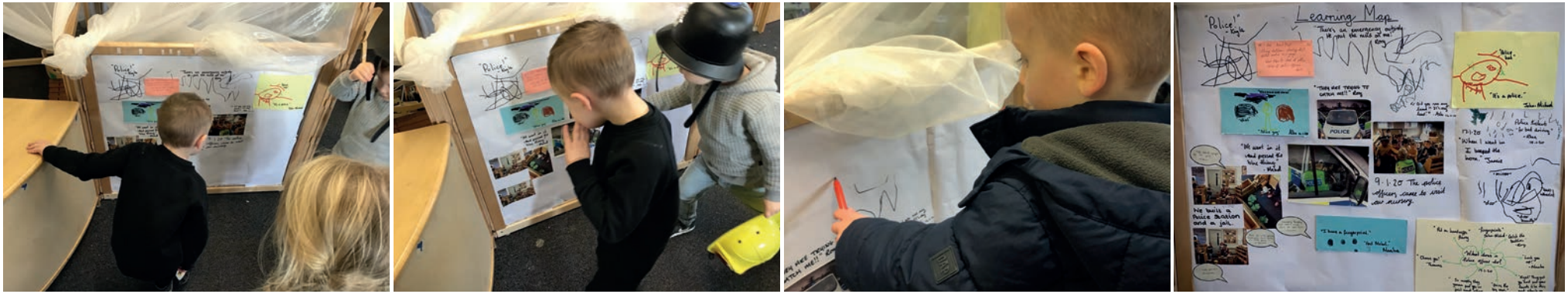
Into practice - observation, planning and facilitating learning responsively and intentionally

Here are some basic principles that might help in responsive and intentional planning:

- Start with the child.
- Remember that your interactions with the child are a key aspect of the learning environment. Carefully consider when to step in and when to step back – this is a skill even the most experienced of us can often misjudge!
- Open-ended experiences and materials allow more exploration. They often lead to deeper and more creative learning as the child is empowered by the fact they cannot respond in a “wrong” way. Process is more important for learning than ‘end products’ at this stage. Different children will get different learning from apparently doing the same thing.
- It is quite alright for us to initiate and suggest intentional learning experiences, as long as we are sensitive to the child’s response. Doing interesting things can sometimes be more important than any routine or practitioner’s plan; children can often determine the duration and focus.
- Outdoor environments often contain more opportunity and stimulate children’s curiosity and wonder for learning than indoor playrooms and classrooms.

Let's consider the cycle of child-led pedagogy in practice in more detail:

Listening with your eyes and ears – informative and meaningful documentation



An example of meaningfully involving children in documentation of their learning

"Is your documentation of learning and development **informative** and **meaningful** to **you, the child, their family** and **other practitioners**?"

The most effective observations and subsequent documentation of young children's learning and development have clear meaning and purpose. They recognise that babies and young children communicate through their actions and emotions alongside their vocalisations and words as they grow and develop.

Focus on capturing how well or how much learning is going on rather than simply commenting on the activity. For example, it is good to know that the children are enjoying playing with the mud kitchen, but it is much more useful to notice the extent to which a child is curiously and creatively exploring how textures change when materials are mixed together, or is interested in transporting particular materials from one part of the garden to another. Learning focussed observations help us to understand the child's interests and stage of development. They support us in considering what to do next to build on the child's learning.

Responsive and intentional planning

The next part of the planning cycle involves the 'what do we do next?' – the planning, assessing and evaluation. The cycle suggests that "Informed by the child's **actions, emotions** and **words – what needs to stay** to reinforce learning and development – and **what needs to change** to inspire new learning and development"

This involves us reflecting on our observations. Some of these will be written down, but there will be other things that we have noticed and remembered during the day. Spending time reflecting on observations enables us to consider what children are interested in or curious about, what ideas they are exploring, or skills they are developing. It may be that for some children, the observations give an insight into the schemas children are engaging in, or their dispositions for learning.

Facilitation

"**Sensitive interactions –** honing the skill of stepping in and stepping back;
Flexible experiences – learn from the child to inform practice;
Variety of spaces - outdoors and inside".

It is through this process of reflection that practitioners are able to facilitate the right kinds of interactions and experiences in considered spaces both outdoors and indoors to extend or consolidate learning. For instance, if children are curious about how textures change when materials are mixed together, then practitioners will be able to provide new materials and sensitive adult support to enable children to find out more about how materials behave. If children are engaged in transporting schema, then practitioners will be able to provide the right loose parts, space and time to enable children to fully explore this.

Curriculum for Excellence

There are strong connections in this guidance about **respect, working with families** and the **importance of relationships**. These in turn link to the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence so that children can become **confident individuals, effective contributors, successful learners**, and **responsible citizens**. You can find the refreshed narrative for Curriculum for Excellence here which shows the four capacities in more depth.
https://scotlandscurriculum.scot

Using **Curriculum for Excellence Principles for Curriculum Design** helps with this process.

Consider:

Breadth: engaging children in a greater range of experiences, using a wider range of contexts for learning

Depth: deepening children's understandings, taking children further and deeper in their inquiry

Progression: building on what children know already, providing provocations and stimulations to extend learning

Challenge and enjoyment: enabling children to be engaged, take responsibility, solve problems and lead and develop further their passion for learning

Relevance: connecting with the children's needs and interests, reflecting children's lives, interests and culture

Coherence: helping children to make connections in their learning, using real life contexts that help children make sense of and apply their learning

Personalisation and choice: tailoring provision to meet individual needs and interests, supporting children to make choices and share their perspective.

6.3 Facilitating playful learning environments

Play is a dynamic process that connects the roles of the child, adult and environment and enables engagement with learning in a playful way.

Playfulness could be described as a disposition and willingness to engage in play. Examining what playfulness looks like in practice helps us to unpick the motivations of both the child and adult, alike. For children, playfulness shows agency. **Agency** is when a child expresses their internal motivations towards leading their own learning through their actions. This in turn helps them build theories about the world around them. For instance, in schematic play such as when young children will transport materials from one place to another, they are seeing these objects as tools in their self-directed play as a means to test their theories in action. Consider what are the other schemas telling us about children's thinking? How can we as educators use these observations to evidence what to do next in a playful way?

Playfulness does not happen by chance. Learning through play requires skilful interactions and conversations in environments that support and extend thinking and actions. It requires adults who are both playful and knowledgeable of the building blocks of early development and learning in order to support and progress learning appropriately. A playful adult nurtures a child's identity as a learner through the connections they make with experiences from home and their ELC or school settings. A playful adult creates a comfortable space where children can experience joy and laughter and hence develop playful learning dispositions.

Interactions to develop my learning - some key aspects of what I need

From birth → **through my early years of childhood**

I need you to be an adult who:

- builds warm, nurturing, respectful and responsive relationships with me, my family and the other adults around me in my ELC or school setting,
- is playful, fun and enjoys learning alongside me,
- recognises that meaningful conversations and interactions are based, not only on subject knowledge, but also on your knowledge of me, my family and my community context,
- responds sensitively to my family culture and home language,
- notices when to pause, engage and extend my learning and interests, through meaningful conversations and interactions,
- recognises the importance of modelling and scaffolding my learning through contexts meaningful and interesting to me,
- acknowledges your responsibility for your own professional learning around specific subject areas such as literacy and numeracy and mathematical development,
- provides both intentional and responsive experiences which actively support the development of my learning
- provides opportunities for one to one and group conversation and interaction,
- can identify relevant materials and an understanding of the learning opportunities which you can offer for my progression in learning
- notices and responds to my developing schemas.

Spaces that develop my learning - some key aspects of what I need

From birth → **through my early years of childhood**

I need spaces that:

- are adaptive and responsive to my emotions, interests and needs both outdoors and indoors,
- promote interesting opportunities for developing learning in literacy, numeracy and other curricular subjects beyond designated 'areas' – encouraging me to connect and reinforce my learning. For example – notice the different ways I am learning literacy and numeracy and mathematical concepts as I play alongside others in the mud kitchen,
- are rich in relevant environmental print showing meaningful connections to the way we use words and numbers in our everyday lives,
- encourage and values play, fun, exploration, enquiry and movement,
- offer independence, choice and opportunities for me to extend my learning with other children and adults,
- provide both open-ended and structured materials which can support and challenge my learning in literacy, numeracy and mathematical thinking, and other curricular areas, in a meaningful way.
- embrace my need to reinforce my learning through schematic play,
- provide regular access to the natural world, enabling experiences, conversations and interactions that promote my curiosity and creativity,
- encourage a sense of safety and security, yet enabling appropriate risky play, which enables me to be playful in my learning, and
- encourage me to use and share my learning in everyday experiences and real life situations.

6.4 Literacy, Numeracy and Mathematical thinking

Literacy, numeracy and mathematical thinking are woven within the fabric of all conversations, interactions and experiences. They are everywhere in the environment. They are part of a child's everyday life and are fundamental to all other learning.

Playful Literacy

Playful literacy starts with the child and positions the child as an expert in using language. From the first moments of life babies engage in communication through sight, touch and sound. Even before a child is born a mother responds to their child's movements in utero with sounds of delight and touch. The child in the womb first learns to recognise their mother's voice and begins to hear sounds from the environment they will soon be part of. A baby's eye contact, gesture and vocalisations such as gurgling or giggling speak a thousand words for the non-verbal child. Such communication marks the first steps in a lifetime of social and emotional communicative development. Spoken language development forms only part of this social and emotional communication. The role of gesture and movement continues to be of significance in fully understanding human communication throughout life. We should recognise that children's voices are communicated through much more than simply verbal means, no matter the age of the child. Therefore listening to young children should involve careful observation of movement and gesture alongside what they simply may say in order to give the child's voice true context and meaning.

Interactions are at the heart of playful literacy development. Careful observations form part of building a picture of where a child is in their learning and determining what they need from us and environment around them to assist further learning. We should tap into what we know about the child's interests and family life to attach talking, listening, reading and writing to meaningful environments and experiences created within settings.

Our ability to use language unlocks all areas of learning. Children's language development thrives through exposure to environments of rich and diverse spoken language experiences. We grow a sense of purpose for the child by our own use of language and engaging them with a wide variety of stories, rhymes, songs, symbols and texts in different media all around them. Building this purpose helps to nurture engagement and encourages children to see themselves as readers and writers. This doesn't just happen by chance.

We need to co-create safe spaces with children to talk, sing, rhyme and play with sounds, vocabulary and print. Role modelling language and building vocabulary to make sense of the world is vital for all young children. The amount and quality of language that children are exposed to is crucial to their progress. The journey begins with noticing and listening to sounds and conversations around them. Alongside this, encouraging an exploration of making marks, from the earliest age, develops an understanding of print as a form of communication and expression of ideas and feelings. Understanding the link between gross and fine motor skill development is crucial for practitioners. Children are better equipped to make fine motor movements if they also have adequate opportunity to develop their gross motor skills. Both are linked. In the development of writing, children need to not only be provided with a wide range of mark-making opportunities when they are small, but also be able to explore other experiences such as manipulating clay or using peg boards, completing jigsaws or sewing to fully develop the small muscles in their hands. When children make marks, other children and adults are the natural audience for their meaning and giving sensitive responses will encourage the child to see their marks and print as purposeful.


Being
me

Overarching themes for literacy learning from birth through the early years of childhood

Literacy develops throughout a child's life from pre-birth and underpins all communication and interaction

Literacy can be attached to everyday learning experiences and opportunities

Warm nurturing relationships help open up communication and connect literacy to the child's life

Literacy experiences should weave, build and grow children's interests, vocabulary and knowledge

Literacy learning should encourage children to see themselves as readers and writers, through purposeful experiences which build on the way that children use literacy

When I am a baby...

- It's important to attune to, and mirror, my gestures, facial expressions and sounds to understand me and help me develop my communication skills.
- Listen and react to sounds in the environment with me
- Use natural resources, musical instruments, books and toys which make sounds and noise with me, encouraging me to listen for and distinguish between sounds.
- Respond to my verbal and non-verbal interactions using rich language and vocabulary recognising that my babbling is a form of communication.
- Provide opportunities for me to be involved in varied conversations which may include daily routines and events.
- Encourage my social and verbal interactions with quality picture books (including both pictures and text) and favourite objects, connecting with my interests and family life.
- Connect with personal stories created with my family through familiar photos, words and objects, engaging with the senses.
- Give me sensory and tactile experiences which encourage me to reach out, laugh and mirror sounds.
- Encourage me to make marks through sensory and messy play, to support my communication of my own thoughts and ideas.
- Provide me with lots of opportunities to develop my gross and fine motor skills.

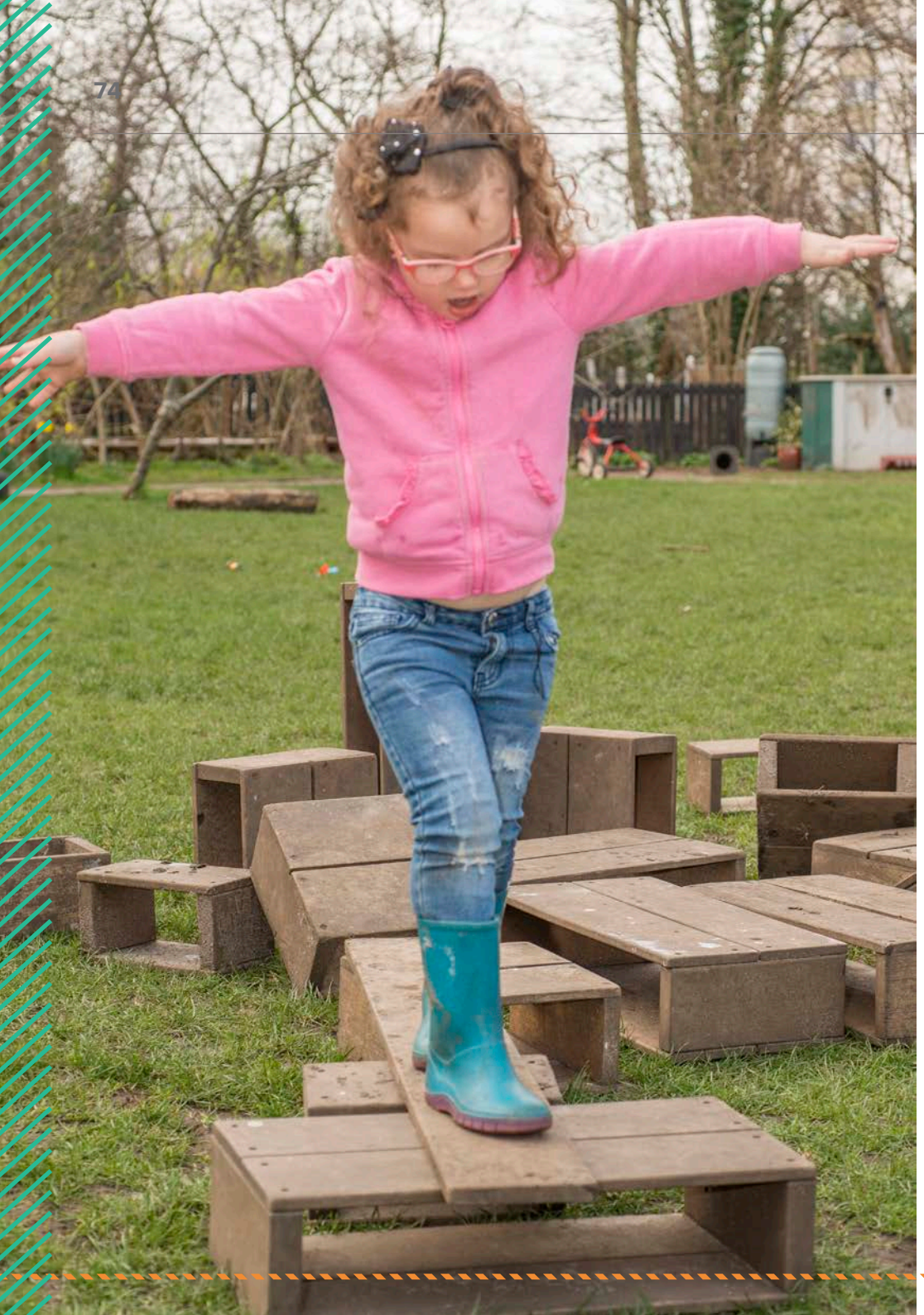
From birth

When I am a toddler...

- Give me opportunities to mirror and listen to adults and other children using gestures, sound and visual cues. This encourages me to participate in and explore language.
- Encourage me to explore, distinguish and react to sounds in the environment with you.
- Play with language - encouraging me to have fun investigating and experimenting with words, rhymes, songs and musical instruments.
- Enrich and extend my verbal and non-verbal interactions using familiar and unfamiliar language and vocabulary.
- Provide opportunities for role-play which combine familiar and new environments, routines and objects to deepen my language experience.
- Continue to share quality picture books with me (including both pictures and text) connecting with my interests and family life, encouraging reciprocal story-telling between you and me.
- Help me connect with stories on a personal and imaginative level, developing an understanding that text conveys meaning.
- Give me sensory and tactile experiences which encourage me to babble, talk and have fun with books.
- Incorporate a wide range of interesting resources which encourage me to communicate ideas through mark making, painting and drawing.
- Provide me with lots of opportunities to develop my gross and fine motor skills.

When I am a young child...

- Provide different opportunities for me to express my thoughts, feelings and opinions, and consider those of others, with adults and my peers in one to one situations and in small groups
- Encourage me to notice patterns, similarities and differences in sounds and words.
- Play with language - encouraging me to have fun investigating and experimenting with words, rhymes, songs and musical instruments, drawing attention to familiar words, phrases and names in my environment.
- Continue to enrich and extend my verbal and non-verbal interactions using familiar and unfamiliar language and vocabulary, relating to my home and life experiences.
- Extend role-play - building on my life experiences and interests encouraging interactions, conversations and new vocabulary.
- Continue to provide me with quality picture books alongside a range of different media, fiction and non-fiction texts, connecting with my interests and family life, encouraging reciprocal story-telling between me and you.
- Encourage enjoyment, engagement and meaning of stories and explore the connections between text and illustrations.
- Continue to give sensory and tactile experiences by providing resources which support talking about stories and factual texts and having fun with books.
- Encourage me to notice the purpose of writing in all environments and to enjoy communicating my ideas through the written word.
- Provide me with lots of opportunities to develop my gross and fine motor skills.



Playful numeracy and mathematical development

Children are curious about the environments surrounding them, even before they are born. They want to know how things work and can use problem solving skills from an early age. Children constantly explore cause and effect through their play.

Numeracy is not just about being able to count. It is about developing number sense which encourages creativity of thought and it allows children to interact with the world around them. Number sense can be used to understand everyday activities. Being able to recognise that symbols have different meaning in different contexts and the ability to quantify e.g. understand the two-ness of 2, is an important life skill.

Numeracy and mathematical thinking encompasses many different elements including recognition of numerical symbols, verbalising numbers and being able to recognise patterns and shapes. It involves many different skills such as understanding numbers, counting, problem solving, measuring, sorting and patterning. However, numeracy is not only about developing these skills. It is also about having the ability to apply these concepts in all areas of life. Therefore numeracy should be embedded throughout the curriculum and the environment and should not simply be seen as an area on its own.

Overarching themes for numeracy and mathematical learning from birth through the early years of childhood

Numeracy and mathematical learning begins at birth and is evident throughout a child's life experiences

Numeracy and mathematical learning can be found **in all aspects of the curriculum** and **all areas of the setting**

Numeracy and mathematical experiences should weave, build and grow children's interests, vocabulary and knowledge

Numeracy learning is enhanced by adults who use purposeful mathematical language when carrying out experiences

Numeracy and mathematical learning should be actively encouraged by providing different materials in different contexts to encourage opportunities for exploration, enquiry and problem solving

When I am a baby...

- Provide a range of richly illustrated books for me. Discuss the illustrations with me using language such as bigger, smaller, up, down, under, over.
- Involve me in simple counting songs with repetition of rhyme and rhythm.
- Encourage me to notice how numbers are evident in my environment.
- Give me time and space to explore toys and materials from different angles and move around freely to investigate my surroundings in terms of position and how my body works.
- Water and sand play are important for me, model pouring and measuring for me to experiment with.
- Provide materials such as paint and clay for me to explore, discussing with me categorising concepts such as hard, soft, wet, dry.
- Encourage me to sort and recognise and make patterns, supporting me to notice differences.
- Encourage my awareness of shape within natural contexts and environments.
- Enable me to play outdoors every day which includes discussing, for example, how the wind blows, the features of natural materials, exploring the textures, weight and size of items such as stones, twigs and plants.

From birth

When I am a toddler...

- Provide richly illustrated books with representations of number, shape and pattern to support conversations with me around these concepts.
- Sing and recite counting songs and rhymes with me, linking to visual representations using rhyme and rhythm.
- Encourage me to notice and use numbers as I explore my environment.
- Encourage me to have fun and play with numbers; investigating and experimenting with quantity, through comparing and contrasting a variety of objects using mathematical language such as less than, more than, same as.
- Continue to give time and space for me to explore toys and materials from different angles.
- Encourage me to move around freely to investigate my surroundings in terms of position and how my body works.
- Ensure my water and sand play is developing more specific language around pouring, measuring, volume, and capacity.
- Provide a variety of materials for me to explore, discussing with me categorising and sorting concepts such as hard, soft, wet and dry.
- Encourage me to sorting and play with patterns, supporting me to identify the characteristics of different objects.
- Encourage me to identify and explore shape within natural contexts and environments.
- Enable daily outdoor play which encourages me to explore natural materials through movement and to gain an understanding of textures, weights and sizes of items.

When I am a young child...

- Continue to provide me with richly illustrated story books with representations of number, shape and pattern to support conversations around these concepts.
- Continue to sing and recite counting songs and rhymes linking to visual representations of numbers that involve counting, ordering and recognising number.
- Encourage me to notice how numbers are evident in my environment and to enjoy using and writing numbers for a purpose.
- Continue to encourage me to play with numbers, having fun investigating and experimenting with quantity, through comparing and contrasting a variety of objects using mathematical language such as less than, more than, same as.
- Support my understanding and use of positional language within everyday experiences and through activities such as role-play, board games, digital technologies and programmable toys.
- Continue to include water and sand play to encourage me to explore, experiment, test and extend ideas developing more specific language and understanding around pouring, measuring, volume, and capacity.
- Provide a variety of materials which encourage my reasoning through experimentation, trial and error and prediction based on my developing understanding of mathematical concepts.
- Encourage me to create my own patterns and sets of objects, identifying and talking about the characteristics we notice together.
- Encourage me to identify and explore shape and symmetry, developing an understanding of characteristics within natural contexts and environments.
- Enable daily outdoor play which encourages me to explore size and perspective through my movements and by seeing familiar objects from a different angle, height or distance.

6.5 Digital technology and the young child

The key to all successful early learning as discussed previously in this guidance are the experiences, interactions and environments we provide for our children. Rapid developments in digital technologies at home and outside, are everywhere. They are changing our habits and, in some cases, making our lives easier and more enjoyable. Mobile phones; tablets; washing machines; televisions; automatic doors; online shopping and "Smart" homes are a few examples of interactive technologies babies and young children may encounter as they grow.

Children can use any resource to promote their learning in at least two different ways. They can learn *about* a resource, and then use this knowledge to learn *with* it.

For example, children can learn about how to use a paint brush and then use their knowledge to learn what happens when they use paint, why does it drip down an easel, what happens when you mix colours together and so on.

It's useful to think of children learning with digital technologies in the same way learning **about** digital technologies involves developing children's understanding of the uses of information and the effect this has on a child's learning. For example, this may be learning how to programme a toy or using a digital camera or using a smartboard.

However learning **with and through** digital technologies can promote and support other learning. For example working out how to park a programmable car in a particular place or using a digital camera to record what happens when you pour substances down a pipe.

An emphasis on learning *with and through* digital technologies, rather than about digital technology will best enhance children's early learning.

The child's view

Children learn through observations, and their attitudes to digital technologies often mirror their family members' behaviours. We see gaps in the day filled through the use of digital technologies to keep babies and children occupied. Therefore, babies and young children's engagement with digital technology does not always result in developing digital literacy skills or result in effective learning. High quality interactions with others is key when learning how to use them; guided interactions from an adult when learning through them; and; when learning about them. Importantly, there is a need to constantly evaluate their purpose and be mindful that digital technologies are not dominant in a young child's life.

Effective use of digital technologies offers an engaging experience for babies and young children. It can address barriers to learning and improve access for children with additional support needs. Applications (apps), tablets, digital cameras, measuring equipment, video calls and voice chats are readily available. Children thrive when they ask, imagine, plan, create and interact with the world around them.

Our role

Digital technologies provide opportunities for us to design a unique learning spaces for the children. Bringing resources and experiences virtually into the setting can lead learning well-beyond what was originally planned For example, in response to a children's interest in sharks, digital technology can extend learning through watching how real sharks move under the sea. Children then get a better understanding of size and speed and so on. This helps us draw on children's own knowledge gained at home or outwith the setting to spark possible lines of development and a response to children's own interests.

In ELC and early primary settings, sharing children's learning through blogs, e-portfolios and email are common place and can be very helpful for parents to see what their child can do in a real time experience. The caveat to this is that programmes which support this can at times, be too restrictive, in not allowing the unexpected or special moments that children experience to be recorded. We therefore also need to ensure that this special information is communicated swiftly through giving the child control of how to communicate his/her achievement. It may be simply a drawing or a painting but to have the original given to the parent or a quiet word with the parent to tell of the special moment when they come to collect their child can be more precious than a photograph. Both systems have their place and are necessary.

In summary;

- children will vary in their experiences and awareness of digital technologies before coming to our settings,
- children are generally curious and want to explore different technologies,
- there is potential for the child to learn with, about and through digital technologies,
- practitioners need to use guided interaction and support for the young child in their exploration of digital technology, and,
- at all times digital technology should reflect the distinctive nature of young children and how they learn.

Further reading: Digital play and under 5's, Dr Lydia Plowman https://dspace.stir.ac.uk/bitstream/1893/17788/1/Digital%20Play%20Stephen%20%26%20Plowman%20Sage%20Handbook.pdf

Section 7: Ensuring quality through critically reflective practice

7.1 Why we should focus on quality

Research has shown that high quality early years provision promotes children's development and learning and, in the longer term, enhances their educational and life chances (Sylva, 2014). However, poor quality services can have a detrimental effect on children's development (Melhuish et al., 2015). Therefore whilst the provision of 1140 hours increases the quantity and flexibility of early learning and childcare, this should not be at the expense of quality, which remains paramount. Throughout this document we have consistently put the experiences of children first. We have to remember that children stand to gain the most from a high quality setting.

7.2 What does high quality practice look like?

Research, such as the EPPE longitudinal study of early childhood and reports from the OECD (2018) help us to get a wider understanding of what constitutes high quality practice.

For the ELC sector specifically, the drivers of high quality provision are summarised in the **Quality Action Plan (2017)** and have helped to shape national support for the sector. **The National Standard for Funded Providers** defines quality criteria that local authorities will use to assess whether a setting can deliver the funded hours and will shape decisions at local authority level.

Expectations in relation to children's care and support in ELC are set out in the **Health and Social Care Standards** and the **Care Inspectorate ELC Quality Framework**. The new Quality Framework is the Care Inspectorate's self-evaluation resource for regulated ELC settings. It supports the ongoing journey of improvement required in meeting children's care and development needs.

Education Scotland's **How Good is Our Early Learning and Childcare** provides a robust quality framework to support critical reflection and continuous improvement for both ELC and early primary settings. It complements **How Good Is Our School 4**. Remember that the different quality indicators support each other, and we might draw from a cross-section of indicators to help them reflect deeply on an aspect of practice. This might include looking at the environments or experiences the setting provides, then considering the progress children are making when they use these.

These documents should help us shape the leadership, management and delivery of provision within individual settings.

The following areas have been highlighted, within these frameworks and the research evidence, as having a particular benefit for young children. They are relevant for the individual day-to-day practice of all those working across the early years sector.

Quality settings have... a clear, shared vision

Effective settings have a clear shared vision for what they would like their provision to be and what they want for the children in their care. The vision should be based on the unique needs of your children and families in your setting. Developing a vision that is co-created by us with children and families means that everyone is working together for the best interests of the children. It is important to refresh the vision from time to time to ensure that it remains relevant to the community you work within.

Quality settings have practitioners with an understanding of child development and how young children learn

Knowledge of child development underpins effective practice and will enable us to:

- understand that children learn best when engaged in meaningful first hand experiences that interest them,
- recognise that young children learn through play with responsive adults who plan experiences which extend learning and understanding, and,
- notice and understand behaviours that underpin early development, such as schematic play, and provide the right kinds of experiences which build on this learning.

Quality settings have... rich adult-child interactions

The quality of adult-child interactions is key in developing effective practice. This includes how we:

- attune the interactions to the developmental stages of children, so that children are supported and also challenged,
- use a range of communication and interaction strategies including describing and commenting on learning and handing over conversational control to children,
- use skillful questions to extend learning, for example, “I wonder why..” I wonder if...”, and,
- work together with children to solve problems, clarify concepts, develop thinking. This is known as **sustained shared thinking.**

Practitioners in high quality provision:

- highly value and promote child initiated experiences and provide spaces to capitalise on children's interests and motivation,
- tune in to child initiated activity and sensitively intervene to extend children's inquiry, problem solving and thinking skills,
- extend learning based on an understanding of developmental stage and interests, rather than providing adult directed activities that have little meaning for children, and,
- enable children to lead their own learning, including planning projects and solving their own problems.

Quality settings understand... the importance of curriculum and pedagogy

We may often find it easier to talk about the activity children are engaging in, rather than the skills and attributes the children are developing. To support children effectively, it is important to have a good understanding of what, as well as how, young children learn. We should:

- understand the learning possibilities afforded by the interactions, experiences and spaces we facilitate for the children so that their learning can be both responsively and intentionally planned for, supported and extended,
- have a good knowledge of what the Early Level of Curriculum for Excellence provides, and facilitate developmentally appropriate experiences that build on what children already know and can do,
- plan experiences that engage children in challenging, risk appropriate play, and,
- provide breadth, depth, space and time for children to be creative and curious.

Quality settings work with families... and value children's learning at home

The EPPE (2014) study found that there were more developmental gains for children in settings that encouraged high levels of family engagement in their children's learning. How practitioners engage with parents, carers and families is a feature of a high quality setting. This includes:

- providing a warm, welcoming ethos that helps all families to feel valued and included,
- understanding that relationships are key to successful partnerships with families,
- seeing families as partners in constructing an understanding of the whole child,
- supporting families to develop confidence in their role as the child's first and most important educator, and,
- capitalising on the learning opportunities provided by transitions into, out of and between settings.

Quality settings have... a skilled workforce who engage in:

- continuous learning and development to better understand and meet the needs and rights of young children, and,
- reflection on practice in the setting; looking outwards to collaborate and learn from others. This includes taking time to visit other settings to share practice and moderate approaches, read about child development and attend professional learning.

7.3 Using critically reflective practice

Self-evaluation involves a continuous process of reflection and development. As part of the responsive planning process, we will be planning new experiences based on our observations of the children's **actions**, **emotions** and **words** and also reflecting on our practice. However, we should also take time to have a deeper and more critical evaluation.

To start the process, it can be helpful to decide on a question to guide reflection, for example, 'How well are we developing children's language and literacy?' 'How well are we engaging all families in their children's learning?' Taking the inquiry question as a starter, we should consider what we do well, what difference does this make, and what might be developed further.

As critically reflective practice is a cyclical process, we should act on developments, and also reflect on how effective these have been in improving the quality of practice. Further areas for improvement may also emerge as developments are implemented. We should consider how this process could be recorded or documented so that we can talk about and evidence the children's development journey.

Critically reflective practice is best done with others, so that ideas can be debated and different viewpoints considered. Joining together to reflect with practitioners in other settings, including other childminders can add a fresh perspective. Partners in the process could also include families, children and other services. It can be challenging gathering children's viewpoints in a meaningful way. This is why we have mindfully focused on reflecting upon the children's **actions**, **emotions** as well as **words** throughout this guidance – as considering all of these factors together best capture the voice of the young child. Approaches such as the Mosaic Approach (Clark, 2017) can provide ideas for ways to document this meaningfully, for example, through photography, video clips or the child's mark-making.

Education Scotland's Scanning and Scoping Cycle offers a practical tool that can help critically reflecting on practice.

It forms part of the Transforming Learning suite of self-evaluation materials on the National Improvement Hub.

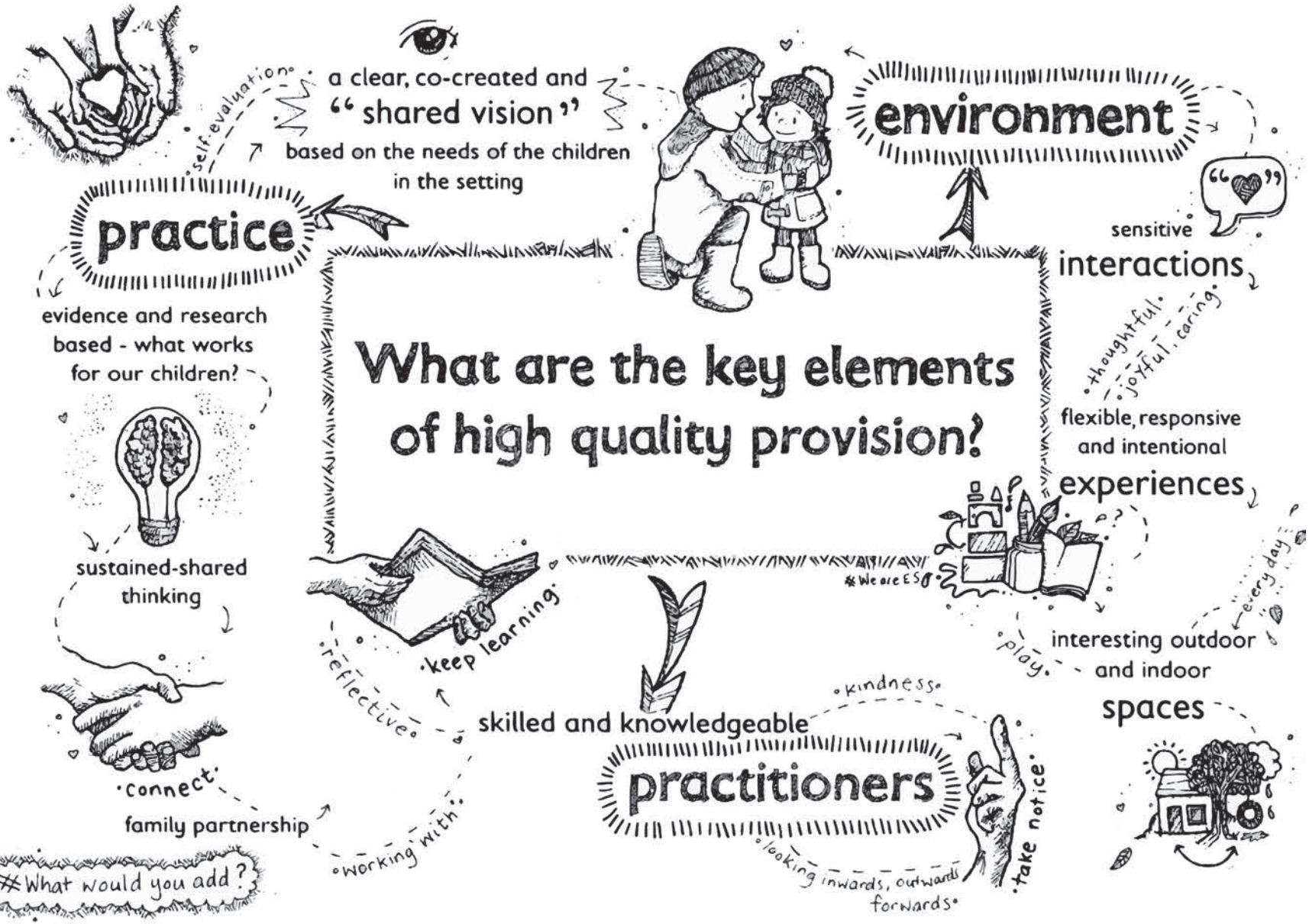
External Scrutiny

Engaging in continuous reflection and self-evaluation for improvement is vital in order to deliver high quality provision for our children. External agencies visit settings to ensure that practice is the best it can be. The aim of everyone involved in inspection is to support settings to deliver this high quality provision. Settings which provide day-care of children are inspected by both Education Scotland and the Care Inspectorate.

The Care Inspectorate are the official body responsible for inspecting standards and supporting improvement of care in Scotland. Under the Public Service Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 the Care Inspectorate has responsibility to regulate and inspect care services including all ELC settings to ensure the provision of high quality experiences that supports positive outcomes for children and families. The Care Inspectorate takes account of the Health and Social Care Standards (2018) and best practice guidance to ensure that babies and young children are receiving the very highest quality of care and learning experiences to promote their wellbeing and development.

Education Scotland use How Good is Our Early Learning and Childcare to evaluate ELC practice and promote improvement that enhances children's experiences. In primary schools How Good is Our School 4 is used Inspectors focus on the quality of children's learning and achievement and have a particular interest in how the setting is developing children's skills in a wide range of areas through developmentally appropriate experiences. This includes developing children's skills in early literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing and provides support to practitioners in their journey to make improvement.

At times ELC settings may have inspection activity at the same time with both organisations. The purpose is to work together to enhance efficiency and streamline the processes for settings. Both organisations will look at the quality of children's experiences and will talk about how the setting's critical reflection and self-evaluation has supported their improvement journey.


What are the key elements of high quality provision?
a clear, co-created and "shared vision"
based on the needs of the children in the setting
self-evaluation
practice
evidence and research based - what works for our children?
sustained-shared thinking
connect
family partnership
working with
reflective
keep learning
skilled and knowledgeable
practitioners
looking inwards, outwards forwards
take notice
kindness
play
interesting outdoor and indoor spaces
every day
flexible, responsive and intentional
experiences
thoughtful
joyful, caring
sensitive
interactions
environment
#We are ES
#What would you add?
Being me

Section 8: Transitions matter; to me

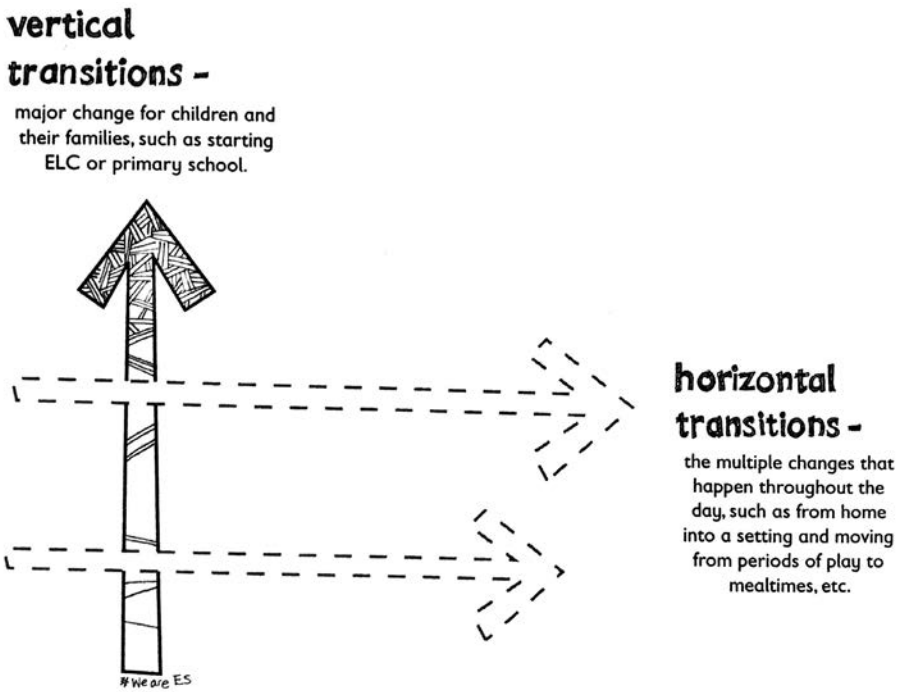
> Quality transitions that are well-prepared and child-centred, managed by trained staff collaborating with one another, and guided by an appropriate curriculum, enhance the likelihood that the positive impacts of early learning and childcare will last through primary school and beyond.

(OECD, 2017:19)

8.1 Defining transition

Transition is considered to be an adjustment over time to new contexts outside the family, where babies and children experience changes to their social environment, to their routines, to what is expected of them and to the relationships they have with others in new situations. Our aspiration should be to promote in babies and children a sense of belonging by providing them with their entitlement to continuity of learning in a caring and respectful environment which reflects the setting's unique culture.

As opportunities to access places in an expanding ELC sector in Scotland increase, more and more of our babies and children will experience **multiple** transitions during their day, their week, their entire learning journey. Given the expansion which will see even more of our very youngest children in settings for longer periods of time, we need to think about what they need, what matters to them, and be even more responsive to the needs of children and families in transition. These transitions will include **horizontal** and **vertical** transitions.



Horizontal and multiple transitions occur when children move between different education and care providers. Horizontal transitions occur when, in the course of their day they may spend time being cared for in the home by a parent, by grandparents or other relatives. Babies and children may spend some time with a childminder, attend a playgroup or a family centre, a private/ voluntary nursery or a local authority nursery. Many of our youngest children will go to a parent and toddler group. At times, children will also experience the involvement of others in their lives, such as doctors, health visitors or social workers.

Because of the many different experiences babies and children may have in just one day, such as, when they move from periods of play to mealtimes, or to taking a nap, it becomes even more important that there is some continuity and similarity of approach in the ways in which the important adults in their lives behave and interact. This is important not only for the children themselves, but also for others such as parents and family members who are regularly involved with them.

Vertical transitions involve a major change for families. They occur when the child moves through the early years system of services towards and including school (O'Connor, 2018: xiii). A vertical transition would involve the child moving from home to nursery or from nursery to primary school. The child in transition from nursery to school is expected to navigate their way through physical changes in the environment they encounter and to the structure of their day (OECD, 2017: 19). The child and his or her family often have to adjust socially and culturally to a new set of routines and rules (Burns, 2018: 36). Steps should be taken by practitioners to minimise the adverse impact that **new routines** and systems can have particularly on children moving from home to ELC or when starting school.

What do babies and children need from practitioners, and others working within the ELC sector and primary schools to ensure a positive transition from home to a nursery setting, within settings and between settings and Primary 1, for children and their families?

We can begin by reflecting on our own curriculum policy and pedagogical practice and comparing this to current research, and national and international policies and other curriculum approaches.

8.2 What we can learn from research

Transition is a complex and dynamic process. In order to better understand this complexity we need to be aware that each child's development is influenced by their direct and indirect experiences of particular social and cultural contexts. In other words, where they live and who they interact with as they grow and develop contribute to shaping who they are as individuals.

> The transition to school together with the transition from home to an ECEC setting are the first occasions in which children experience a big cultural change, in the people around them, the ways in which they interact, their number of peers, the types of activity they engage in, and their physical surroundings.
>
> **(OECD, 2017: 17)**

Research tells us that a child's individual personal characteristics, their family background and experiences will have an influence on how well they adjust to the challenges of a new situation. We should not expect babies and young children to immediately settle into unfamiliar routines or playroom layouts without careful preparation. Such preparation would include well considered settling in arrangements being discussed and agreed with parents.

Margetts suggests that children starting school 'bring more than their backpacks to school' (2003:7). We need to think carefully about how we manage children's transition into a larger group with fewer adults around to provide them with the kind of responsive interactions they will have become accustomed to in their previous setting.

Learning the culture of the playroom or classroom can be particularly challenging for some children (Fabian, 2003). Others will ease into their new surroundings with little sign of anxiety or loss of confidence. As we already know, children have an uneven pattern of development. The skilful practitioner will help individuals to become confident, secure and comfortable as they settle into and find their place within the rhythm of the playroom or classroom.

8.3 Why we should place such a strong emphasis on improving transitions for children

It is now widely acknowledged that the child's earliest experiences at home and in education and care settings are critical for their future social and cognitive development.

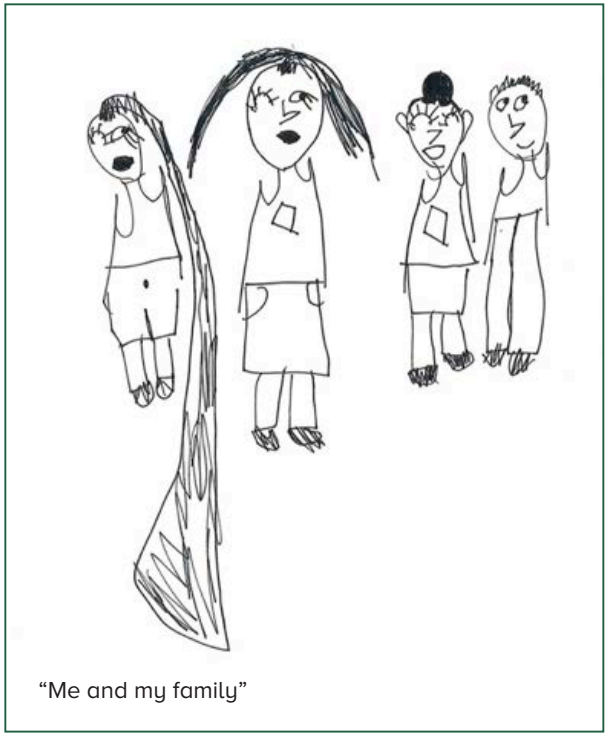
> A successful transition experience at this stage is likely to influence whether or not they can develop their full potential, and their ability to cope with future transitions.
>
> **(OECD,2017:13)**

It is important therefore for us to find ways to support the child's social, emotional and mental wellbeing by engaging meaningfully with others, including parents as equal partners in the transitions process. We will be more successful in improving transitions for children; by planning playful learning experiences which are child-led, responsive, flexible, and continuous. We can make this happen, through regular, focussed collaborative activity, to include the voice of the child and family in our transitions planning.

The focus of our collaborative work should be to build on what the child already knows and can do, avoiding completely the 'fresh start approach'.

Adopting developmentally appropriate pedagogical practices will reap greater benefits for children's social, emotional and cognitive development. It will be necessary for adults working with babies and young children to understand the value of play pedagogy and responsive planning thereby promoting a child-initiated curriculum .

In the following sections some key features of positive transitions practice are set out, some of the features will apply equally to all types of transition. This is not an exhaustive list, and you may know of other ways to ensure transitions are well-supported and which result in positive outcomes for babies, children and families.



"Me and my family"

8.4 Key features of positive transitions practice from home to an early learning and childcare setting

- parents can expect to stay and help settle their baby/child into their new environment within a culture which consistently values their contribution as the baby's/child's first educator
- effective two-way communication with parents and other adults who are involved with the baby/child to include regular, face to face meetings, including home visits, and written communications using a variety of appropriate platforms
- regular child-centred opportunities for talk and discussion, stories and play, which help babies and children to express their feelings, and any anxieties they may have about their new surroundings
- practitioners observant of gestures and body language and asking themselves 'what does the baby or young child need from me?'
- flexible routines and structures in settings which allow the baby/child and also siblings to see one another and not to be separated for entire sessions into different age groups
- protected time for practitioners to collaborate in planning for a holistic transition for individual babies and children
- practitioners who encourage the bringing of transitional objects, a favourite cuddly toy, blanket, as we know they help the baby/child to make sense of and make connections with their new surroundings

8.5 Key features of positive transitions practice within and across an ELC setting

- practitioners who are responsive to the **small** transitions that occur throughout the day; nappy changing, mealtimes, moving between rooms and adjusting emotionally in response to changes of practitioners working on shift patterns
- communication systems that keep parents well informed about when and why a move to a new playroom for their child is likely
- arrangements that acknowledge that children do not need to move into the next playroom just because they have had a birthday
- practitioners who regularly involve parents in collectively agreeing the right time for the transition to occur (SEED, 2003)

8.6 Key features of positive transitions practice for babies and children accessing more than one education and care setting/provider

- frequent communication and information sharing systems between practitioners in other settings/provision which include parental views and are intent on shaping the nature of children's day to day experiences; including the requirement for personal plans
- recognition from practitioners of a shared responsibility for planning for continuity of learning and curriculum experiences between settings/ provider
- well defined systems in place for settling babies/children as they make the move each day from one form of provision to the other
- consistency of formats used by practitioners for reporting to parents on their baby's/child's progress and development

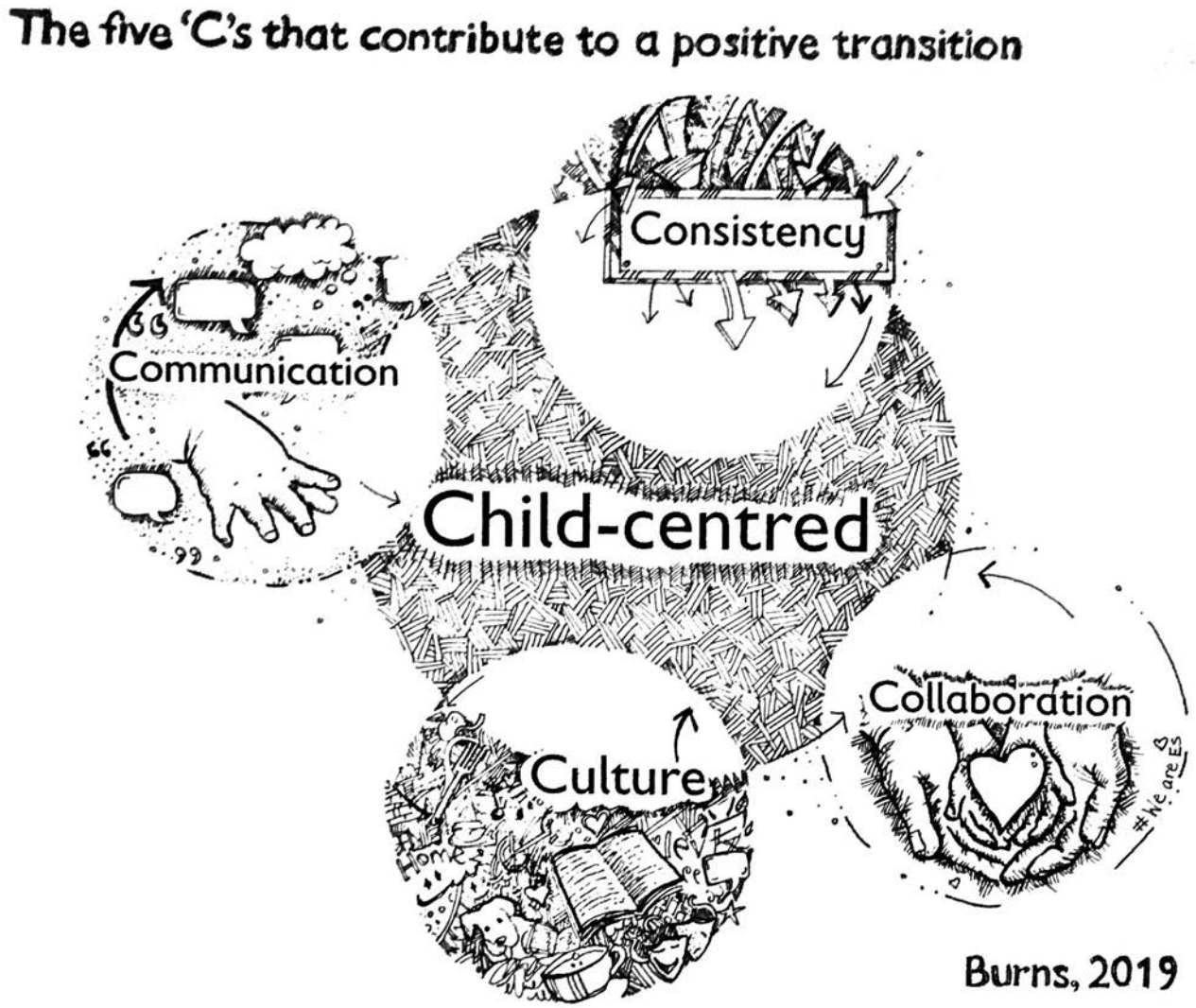
8.7 Key features of positive transitions practice for babies and children and families who need additional support

- enhanced transition arrangements which focus on sharing key information with parents, relevant professionals and agencies to ensure children's individual needs are known and planned for
- reasonable adjustments are made to the physical environment to ensure children are able to be included and can access resources inside and outdoors
- planning systems which take due account of the specific needs of individuals and these are set out in children's personal plans
- induction programmes include inputs from relevant health care specialists and others who can provide targeted and universal support for parents of children with additional support needs, with EAL, and for families facing multiple barriers including poverty related challenges
- coherent and integrated services that help the child/family to cope with new situations and can ease the transition for those who work with them

8.8 Key features of positive transitions practice from an early learning and childcare setting to school

- practitioners/teachers who recognise that for every child the transition experience is unique to them and who provide environments that are ready for children, that meet children's needs and the needs of their family
- collaboration between practitioners and teachers which is focused on planning a continuous 'early level' curriculum experience
- play pedagogy in the early stages of primary school, that is built on a clear and shared rationale and distributed leadership
- a shared understanding between practitioners and teachers of the benefits of children's active engagement in planning their learning
- induction programmes that value parents' knowledge of their child and the learning children bring with them to school
- priming activities which promote parents' active participation during the transitions process rather than being viewed as passive recipients of information and rules to be followed
- bespoke and or enhanced transition arrangements for children with additional support needs

The five 'C' s that contribute to a positive transition



Further reading

The Scottish Early Childhood Children and Families Transitions Position Statement was launched in May 2019. It sets out a set of aims, six principles and recommendations for, 'all who place an importance on early childhood experiences, who are committed to the bests interests of the child, and know that means working together with both children and their families to ensure the best of experiences, positive relationships, positive continuity in wellbeing, play and learning' (Scottish ECCCFTPS, 2019: 10)

https://education.gov.scot/improvement/self-evaluation/scottish-early-childhood-and-families-transitions-statement

Section 9: What we can learn from other curriculum approaches

In this section we invite you to look outwards to reflect on what you can learn from other curriculum approaches. **Our Scottish early childhood curriculum promotes a child-centred approach.** We recognise the value of a flexible and responsive curriculum. We know that positive outcomes for children and families are realised in settings which uphold the rights of the child. Where respect and responsiveness to the holistic needs of the individual baby and child are the defining features and are achieved through reciprocal relationships and collaboration.

By casting our eye beyond own curriculum model we can be reassured that others share our values and beliefs about how babies and children learn best. By deepening our understanding of other curriculum approaches we can innovate within our own curriculum context; weaving new threads of knowledge into our curriculum to ensure we provide what children need from us in terms of high quality early childhood experiences.

9.1 Te Whāriki

> **He taonga te mokopuna, kia whangaia, kia tipu, kia rea.**
> A child is a treasure, to be nurtured, to grow, to flourish

(New Zealand Curriculum Guidance, 2017, Foreword: 2)

These words capture the immense potential that every child is born with. First published in 1996, Te Whāriki, the New Zealand early childhood curriculum is built around a set of principles, strands, goals and learning outcomes some of which we would recognise. There are other aspects which are unique to the bicultural foundation of New Zealand.

However, in Te Whāriki, we would recognise the holistic nature of the curriculum, one which includes all the experiences, activities and opportunities children have within their setting and beyond. Te Whāriki, guidance stresses the importance of responsive, respectful relationships, nurtured through trust and an agreed set of values and aims.

There is an expectation that the curriculum will be woven into a unique mat or 'whāriki', that reflects the distinctive character of the setting and its community and which prioritises the needs and aspirations of the child and family.

This internationally regarded curriculum framework is underpinned by a vision that children are:

> Competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in body, mind and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society

(New Zealand Curriculum Guidance, 2017, Introduction: 6)

Here are some aspects of Te Whāriki, which you might find interesting as you reflect on your own practice.

The term *Kaiako* includes all teachers, educators and other adults, including parents in parent-led services who have a responsibility for the care and education of children in an ELC setting to convey the reciprocal nature of teaching and learning, which is valued in this curriculum.

Te Whāriki, is underpinned by four fundamental principles: **empowerment**, **holistic development**, **family and community** and **relationships**.

The principles provide the foundation for the curriculum, pedagogy and practice. There are five strands of learning and development: wellbeing, belonging, contribution, communication and exploration. The set of goals are aimed at 'Kaiako', they describe the characteristics of facilitating environments and pedagogies that are consistent with the principles and that will support children's learning and development across the strands. A set of learning outcomes are provided to inform planning and evaluation and to support the assessment of children's progress.

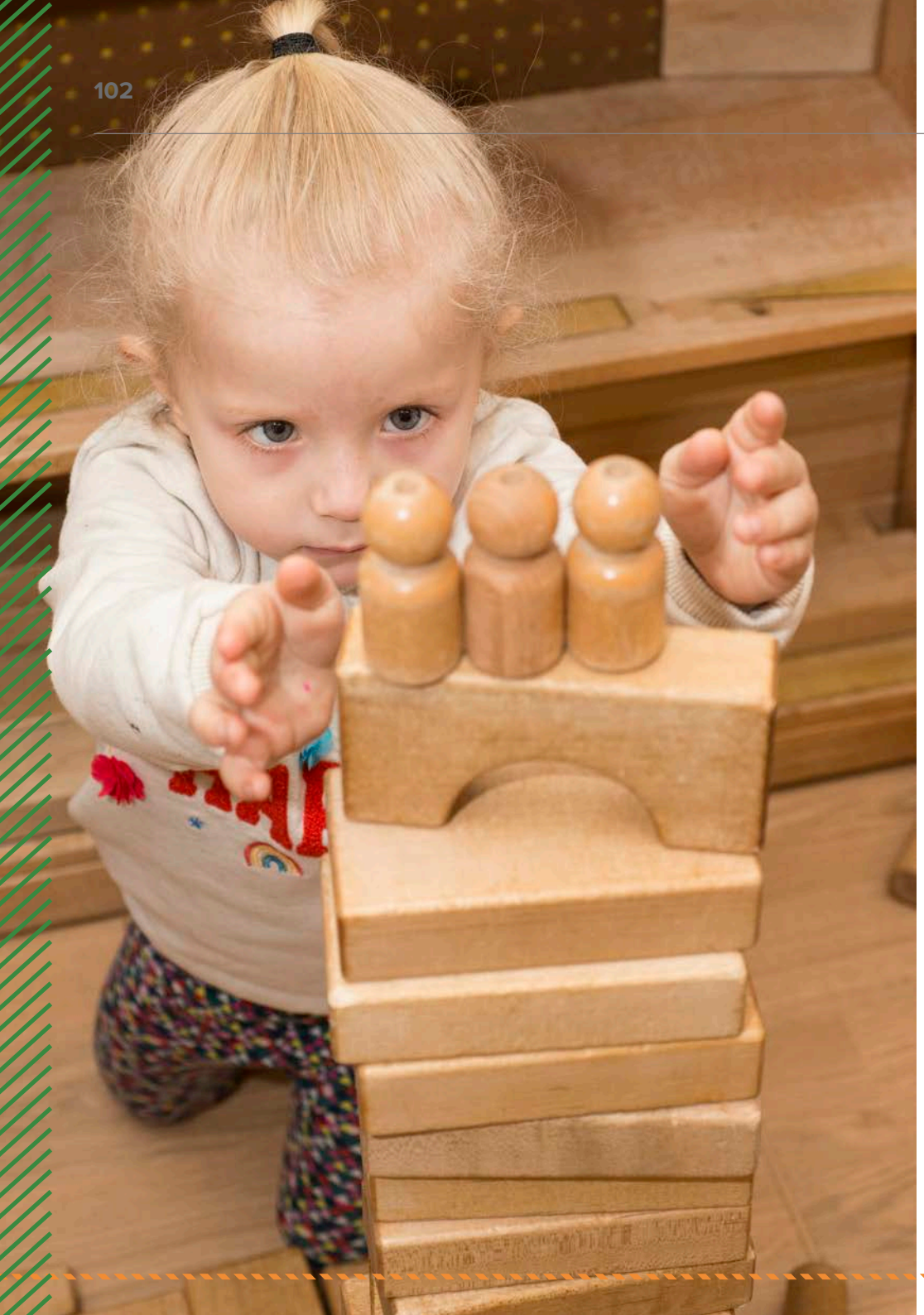
(New Zealand Curriculum Guidance, 2017:16)

Challenge questions

In what ways do you ensure parents can be reciprocal partners in planning the curriculum in your setting?

What contribution do family and the wider community make to implementing your curriculum?

Further reading- https://www.education.govt.nz/early-childhood/teaching-and-learning/te-whariki/



9.2 Friedrich Froebel and Froebelian practice today

> … a good framework transforms itself and is as relevant today as it was when it was first formed.

(Bruce, 2012: 6)

Friedrich Froebel was born in 1782 in the German village of Oberwissbach in the Thuringian Forest. In 1840 he established the first kindergarten (garden for children) in Blankenburg. Through his work and writing, Froebel succeeded in changing the way we think about childhood and the education of young children. His ideas about learning through nature and the importance of play spread throughout the world and continue to have relevance today.

Much of what we now take for granted in early learning and childcare has its origins in Froebel's ideas. Outdoor play is an obvious example. Other examples include play with blocks, sand, water, clay, finger rhymes, painting, and drawing. Familiar practices, such as observation-led planning, and partnerships with parents and the wider community, can be traced back to Froebel's pioneering work.

Challenge questions

Reflect on your observations of children and what you do with the information you gather to plan future provocations/activities.

Think about how you record those 'aha moments'. Do you write down what you observe or what you will do as a result of what you observe?

Modern Froebelians

Many practitioners today identify themselves as Frobelians, meaning that their practice is informed by values and principles first established by Froebel almost 200 hundred years ago. Modern Froebelians sometimes refer to their approach as 'principled practice' to indicate their strong belief that effective practice is grounded in values, and on a sound understanding of how young children learn.

Helen Tovey expresses this clearly when she writes:

> A Froebelian approach is not a method. There is no formula or recipe to follow or set of equipment to purchase or prescribed curriculum to adhere to. Nor is it a series of ideas and activities which practitioners can dip into and out of. Rather it is a whole way of thinking about children and childhood, based on a set of values and principles.

(Tovey, 2013)

Drawing on the approach Froebel himself used to develop his innovative theories and practice, modern Froebelians stress the importance of careful observation of children. This, together with reflective practice and strong professional learning, is how they are able to translate Froebel's original ideas into practice relevant to children and families today, and into the future.

A Froebelian approach is applicable wherever adults work with children and families. This means that it can be used by practitioners working in rural and urban settings, in outdoor settings, and by child-minders looking after children at home and even in the early stages of our primary schools.

Further reading https://www.froebel.org.uk

9.3 Nature kindergartens

> "I Ur och Skur 'Rain or Shine' schools"
>
> **(Roberston, 2008:1)**

Nature based learning is an approach in early learning and childcare settings and schools that has gained popularity in Scotland over the last two decades, but the concept has been around for much longer. The concept of the 'Skogsmulle ' is considered by some to originate in Sweden in the 1950s (Roberston, 2008:3). However, it wasn't until the 1980s that the first Swedish forest school opened using a set of principles which arguably are still of relevance today for those interested in adopting a nature kindergarten approach. The principles are fundamentally about the sensory nature of the outdoors and how regular physical contact with the environment benefits children's social, emotional, mental wellbeing as well as their cognitive growth.

Challenge questions

Reflect on the suitability of your outdoor spaces to support children's sensory play.

Does the environment help children to use all of their senses? Are there opportunities to develop children's hearing and listening?

List the features of the environment that promote each of the five senses. Are there gaps in provision? If there are, how will you improve children's sensory experiences?

Nature kindergartens can be found in many countries around the world, notably the Nordic countries, Australia and more recently Scotland. There are of course cultural differences between the nature-based learning approaches which not surprisingly reflect the unique historical, cultural and political contexts of each country and, of course, each setting. The aspirations and expectations of parents and the communities in which they live, shape opinion on risk-taking activities. Similarly, on the amount of time children should spend outside in challenging weather conditions, or how safe it is for young children to have free rein to climb trees or to cook over a fire pit. The approaches which are employed in Norwegian kindergartens differ in a number of ways to those in nature kindergartens or forest schools in Scotland. These differences may be influenced by the existence of health and safety legislation, by deeply held views and practices in our ELC settings.

Challenge questions

Reflect on the opportunities the environment affords children for risky play.

What changes might you make to the environment to develop children's resilience and skills in managing risk.

McQuarrie et al (2013) in their study of nature-based learning found that while we might talk about learning outdoors and share terminology such as outdoor nurseries, or nature kindergartens or forest school, local contexts exert an influence not only on the pedagogy and practice within each, but on children's play and learning experiences. We may use the same words but the reality for the child will vary according to cultural interpretations of policy and guidance. And yet, we can agree that there are many benefits, when it comes to playing outdoors and learning from nature, which cross socio-cultural boundaries. Research and practice has shown that the key benefits of a nature-based learning approach include:

- increased self-esteem and confidence,
- helping to develop social skills and language and communication skills,
- building confidence in problem solving and motivation for learning, expanding knowledge,
- improved physical health including fine and gross motor skills, and,
- promoting curiosity, teambuilding, perseverance and resilience.

(Adapted from O'Brien, 2009:50)

In Scotland we have a plethora of guidance and well established practice from which we can learn.

Further reading can be found at:

https://creativestarlearning.co.uk/international/significant-scottish-outdoor-learning-and-play-documents/

https://education.gov.scot/improvement/practice-exemplars/get-the-bairns-oot-an-outdoor-kindergarten-in-norway

9.4 Reggio Emelia Approach

> Our task is help children communicate with the world using all of their potential, strengths and languages, and to overcome any obstacle presented by our culture

Loris Malaguzzi

The Reggio Emelia Approach offers a philosophy, which is centred on the image of the child. Carla Rinaldi writes that right from the moment of birth, the child should be viewed as competent, a fully participating citizen who possesses rights. The child has **rights** rather than **needs** and the role of the practitioners is to ensure that these rights flourish. Children from birth are viewed as strong, powerful and rich in potential and resources. The Reggio Approach is a way of being, living and learning rather than a rigid curriculum to be adhered to or delivered.

The Reggio Approach has evolved over time and continues to evolve as practitioners reflect and redefine what they do to take cognisance of research such as neuroscience.

In 2012 Howard Gardner said,

> The Reggio Approach' in other parts of the world, outside Reggio Emilia only makes sense if we are capable of re-inventing it, if we are capable of understanding the context we work in, the values in which each culture believes, and then compare these with what Reggio has been capable of creating in its own specific context, with its own resources.

Reggio as a philosophy has its roots in constructivist and sociocultural theory, where adult intervention is considered necessary for learning. Practitioners believe the child has infinite curiosity, searching all the time for reasons and solving problems, capable of constructing their own knowledge, skills and capacities. This belief is woven into the everyday practice that can be seen in Reggio settings.

"How does my face work?"

Challenge questions

What can we learn from the Reggio Approach?

How often do you provide opportunities which specifically promote children's curiosity and problem solving skills?

It is worth noting that practitioners in a Reggio Emelia setting have a dual role, firstly to learn alongside their children often in pairs in 'learning groups', becoming involved in the learning experiences themselves both as a guide and a resource. Secondly, practitioners are expected to reflect deeply about their practice; acknowledging what they have learned about themselves and about their teaching.

Here are three key features which are associated with the Reggio Approach; a bottom-up rather than top-down curriculum, organisation of the environment, and documentation (Ann Lewin-Benham, 2011:7-18).

Are these prominent features of your practice? What actions might you take to adjust your curriculum, the environment and documenting children's progress in learning?

A bottom-up rather than top-down curriculum

The emphasis is on responding to children's interests through conversations which help to shape the projects which children and adults engage in together often over extended periods of time. This way of working is thought of as an 'emergent curriculum' (https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/reggio-emilia-approach/) whereby projects or themes are developed as a result of extensive conversations with children and planning by practitioners.

The environment is the curriculum

Great care and attention is given to the physical environment. Lewis-Benham (2011) suggests the **environment is the curriculum** such is the attention given in Reggio settings to designing the physical spaces for learning. The environment in a Reggio setting will be uncluttered, it will promote children's thinking, the décor will have soft muted tones and the design, type and layout of furniture and resources will have been carefully chosen to promote the development of self-regulation, to create space in which children can collaborate for extended periods of time on projects. Children often set their own limits, particularly in their outdoor spaces.

Documentation

Documentation in a Reggio setting is all about reflection; to generate thinking and to engage children, families and practitioners in building and sustaining relationships. The end product of a period of documentation is often a visual panel which depicts the intention and meanings behind a particular project of collaboration and activity over time. The panels offer a record of the past and the future, the idea being that they can be revisited and have the potential to be the catalyst for future projects.

Further reading can be found at:

https://thereggioapproach.weebly.com/reggio-philosophy-and-principles.html

Section 10: Conclusions

Realising the Ambition; Being Me, aspires to support all working with and for the babies and young children of Scotland. It deliberately invites you to hear the child's voice. The existence of the child's voice throughout the sections helps us all be mindful of who matters the most, and what they need from us, to develop, to learn, and to experience success in their young lives. It raises the bar from the original Building the Ambition to widen the scope within the guidance. It provides a repository of information and good practice for all working within the ELC sector into the early stages of primary stages, and beyond. This collective investment in seeking to improve children's futures brings responsibilities for us all.

Realising the Ambition - Being Me complements Scottish Government's Programme of Early Learning and Childcare Expansion. It supports the key areas of ELC policy, guidance and good practice that all those working in this sector need to know to do their best for children. It may reaffirm what is good practice for some, but also provokes challenge and opportunity for us all to improve the quality of our work. For others, some aspects will be new and the guidance gives opportunities for self-reflection and a mandate to attempt new things on the journey to raise quality.

It is now for individuals, establishments, schools and local authorities to consider and reflect on the guidance and how, individually and in partnership, they can realise the importance of everyone playing their part in empowering all of Scotland's children to "be me".

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Being me and
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