

Playful Pedagogy Awareness

INTO Survey Report

Irish National Teachers' Organisation
Vere Foster House
35 Parnell Square
Dublin 1

Telephone: 01 804 7700
Email: info@into.ie
Web: <http://www.into.ie>
General Secretary: John Boyle

Cumann Múinteoirí Éireann
Áras Vere Foster
35 Cearnóg Parnell
Baile Átha Cliath 1

Guthán: 01 804 7700
Ríomhphost: info@into.ie
Gréasán: <http://into.ie>
Rúnaí Ginearálta: John Boyle



Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

Introduction

Findings

Playful Pedagogy Awareness Project

1. Overview of Playful Pedagogy Awareness Project
2. INTO Survey on Playful Pedagogy Awareness
3. Conclusions and Recommendations

References

Appendices

Acknowledgements

Prepared by This report was prepared by Diarmuid Creedon and Ciara Leddy with the assistance of the INTO Education Committee, and the Head Office Education Team.

INTO Education Committee

Dorothy McGinley	President
Carmel Browne	Vice-President
Lisa Magennis	District 1
Caolán Byrne	District 2
Lisa O'Donnell	District 3
Michelle Bonner	District 4
Aisling McGovern	District 5
Siobhán Lynskey	District 6
Dolores Killian	District 7
Alice O'Donnell	District 8
Eimear Cregg	District 9
Niamh Campion	District 10
Aidan Gaughran	District 11
Fiona Garvey	District 12
Majella Sutton	District 13
Sarah Morris	District 14
Marianne Craig	District 15
Muireann Ní Arrachtáin	District 16
John Boyle	General Secretary
Máirín Ní Chéileachair	Director of Education, Research & Learning
Nuala O'Donnell	Senior Official, NI

INTO Education Team

Máirín Ní Chéileachair, Assistant General Secretary
Merrilyn Campbell
Ann McConnell

Abbreviations

CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
EDC	Education Committee
INTO	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
NI	Northern Ireland
ROI	Republic of Ireland
SET	Special Education Teacher

Introduction

Traditionally, teaching in Ireland has been conducted using direct instruction methodologies aimed at transmitting information from set curricula. Playful teaching methodologies have, in the main, been used in early childhood education and junior primary classes with a perceived incompatibility between teaching and play in senior primary classes. Pedagogical debates surrounding the effectiveness of playful teaching methods in senior classes have often taken a back seat with the focus primarily revolving around creating learning environments for the transmission of learning from teacher to pupil (Walsh et al., 2010).

Early childhood education has been widely recognised for its developmentally appropriate approach that places play as the primary medium for young children's learning and development. The concepts of child-centredness, child-initiation, and holistic learning experiences have shaped these settings, leaning on the use of independent play, exploration, and the construction of children's own understandings within safe and enjoyable environments (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019). This approach can be traced back to influential thinkers such as Rousseau, Froebel, and Pestalozzi, who, as early as the eighteenth century, associated children's learning with pleasurable and child-led activities. However, within the realm of primary education, teaching and play have often been seen as opposing concepts once the children transition away from junior/senior infants in the Republic of Ireland and Primary 1/2 in Northern Ireland (Walsh et al., 2010).

While play-based learning has been extensively researched in early childhood education, its potential benefits for older pupils, has received less attention (Johnston et al., 2023). Although the advantages of play in learning have been established for younger children, research on the role of play in learning for senior primary students and beyond remains limited. This gap in knowledge points to the need for exploration of the benefits and potential of play-based learning for all primary pupils, drawing upon the well-established evidence from early childhood education.

Across Irish education there has been a growing recognition of the value of play-based learning in primary education, as evidenced by recent policy and curriculum developments in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland (Gray & Ryan, 2016). These policy and curriculum developments have embraced play as a crucial element of young children's learning and have brought about significant shifts in pedagogical approaches within primary settings. The Foundation Stage (FS) Curriculum in NI and Aistear, the early childhood curriculum framework in the ROI, both highlight the importance of play and active learning in young children's educational experiences, emphasising the role of skilled practitioners in facilitating children's thinking and learning. The redevelopment of the primary curriculum and the Primary Curriculum Framework (Department of Education and Skills, 2023) indicates that the value of play is set to be realised across the entirety of the ROI's primary school curriculum.

Considering the increasing recognition of play-based learning in Ireland and the limited existing research on its benefits, the INTO Education Committee (EDC) saw it as timely to explore the awareness of playful pedagogy among Irish teachers. This report provides an overview of the project conducted by the EDC. It also presents the findings from a survey of INTO members in relation to their awareness of playful pedagogy and concludes with a set of recommendations.

Findings

Playful Pedagogy Awareness

I. Overview of Playful Pedagogy Awareness Project

I.1 Outline of Project

The concept of playful pedagogy has gained significant recognition as a developmentally appropriate approach to foster pupil's learning and holistic development. Recognising the importance of this approach, the INTO Education Committee (EDC) set out to understand the levels of awareness around playful pedagogy among its members. The EDC hoped that gaining this insight would allow the INTO to support its members more effectively, particularly given the imminent redevelopment of the PC in the ROI. With that in mind, the EDC prepared three questions to determine the understanding, challenges, and factors influencing the implementation of playful pedagogy among teachers across the island of Ireland:

- 1. What do teachers understand about playful pedagogy, and how does this understanding vary across different class levels?*
- 2. What are the challenges and barriers that teachers may encounter when trying to implement playful pedagogy, and how can they be overcome?*
- 3. What are the factors that influence teachers' willingness and ability to implement playful pedagogy, such as school culture, parental expectations, and assessment policies?*

To address these questions, a short survey was created, see Appendix A. Before the actual data collection took place, a pilot test was conducted by the members of the EDC to ensure the survey's effectiveness and to address any issues or ambiguities.

The project aimed to gather data from teachers across various class levels through a random sample of 3000 members. The distribution of the survey and the data collection procedures were carefully planned and implemented to ensure equal representation across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Quantitative data was used to identify patterns and trends in the responses, while qualitative data was read by the authors and coded using a grounded theory style content analysis. Through this analysis, an understanding of playful pedagogy awareness, the challenges encountered during implementation, and the influential factors shaping teachers' willingness and ability to adopt playful pedagogy were uncovered.

Based on the findings, a set of practical recommendations was developed. These recommendations aim to enhance teachers' understanding and knowledge of playful pedagogy, provide strategies to overcome challenges and barriers, and suggest approaches to cultivate a supportive school culture. The recommendations look to primarily support individual teachers but also have broader implications for educational policy and practise which will be advocated for by the INTO, ultimately benefiting the educational experiences and outcomes of pupils across Ireland.

I.2 Presentation at the INTO Education Conference 2023

Members of the INTO Education Committee (EDC) will present this project on playful pedagogy awareness among Irish teachers to members at the INTO Education Conference 2023. The conference provides an ideal platform to showcase the project's findings, reflecting the committee's commitment to promote progressive education practices. Sharing the survey findings with members

fosters a collective understanding of play in current primary education and encourages INTO members to play a pivotal role in influencing pedagogical practices.

The INTO Education Conference also serves as a hub of collaboration, where educators from diverse backgrounds meet to exchange ideas and experiences. Disseminating the findings to INTO members serves to empower them as education decision-makers and allows their insights to be channelled towards influencing policy decisions and curricular reforms that integrate play-based learning into all primary classrooms.

The INTO Education Conference is regularly attended by education stakeholders, including policymakers, Department of Education officials, and curriculum developers. The presentation of this project's findings at the conference may act as a bridge between the research and the practical classroom implementation of the recommendations presented in this report.

2. INTO Survey on Playful Pedagogy Awareness

2.1 Introduction

A copy of the INTO playful pedagogy awareness survey was sent electronically to 3000 randomly selected INTO members across the island of Ireland. In total, 79 were returned, a response rate of 2.6%.

The responses are considered under the three EDC questions:

- 1. What do teachers understand about playful pedagogy, and how does this understanding vary across different class levels?*
- 2. What are the challenges and barriers that teachers may encounter when trying to implement playful pedagogy, and how can they be overcome?*
- 3. What are the factors that influence teachers' willingness and ability to implement playful pedagogy, such as school culture, parental expectations, and assessment policies?*

Profile of Respondents

The survey garnered responses from a diverse group of participants. Mainstream class teachers made up 57% of respondents, with 39% SET/Special Class Teachers, and 27% involved or working solely in school management. 34% of respondents indicated that they taught in junior classes with 27% reporting that they taught in senior primary classes. Additionally, the gender distribution reveals 8% as male, 91% as female, and 1% choosing not to disclose their gender.

Regarding experience, 34% had spent have 0-15 years in education, while 66% reported having 16-30+ years of teaching experience.

In terms of socio-economic context, 32% work in settings with social deprivation funding (DEIS/Hot School Lunches), while 68% work in settings without such funding.

Limitations of Survey

The simple random sampling method used in this survey, where 3,000 surveys were issued but only 79 were returned, presented several significant limitations. This low response rate raised concerns about the representative nature of the sample. With such a small number of responses relative to the overall sample size, it is challenging to draw meaningful conclusions or extrapolate the findings to the broader teaching population across Ireland. The limited data collected may not capture the true awareness levels accurately, and the results are likely to be heavily skewed by the preferences and characteristics of the small subset of respondents who did participate.

2.2 Awareness and Perception of Playful Pedagogy

Successful playful pedagogy implementation depends on educators' awareness and willingness to embrace these teaching approaches. This section presents findings from teachers' own assessments of their level of awareness, confidence, and incorporation of playful pedagogy, as well as their beliefs about its impact on pupil engagement and learning outcomes. Additionally, the section examines whether teachers have received explicit training in playful pedagogy. The analysis aims to provide insights into the current state of awareness and perceptions of playful pedagogy among Irish primary school teachers.

Awareness of Playful Pedagogy

The survey participants were asked to rate their familiarity with the concept of 'playful pedagogy' on a scale from 1 (no familiarity) to 10 (very familiar). The results indicated a mixed level of familiarity among the respondents. Overall, 42% of respondents perceived themselves as being very familiar with playful pedagogy, indicating a large degree of awareness within the surveyed population. However, 18% of teachers reported having little to no familiarity with the concept, highlighting the presence of a knowledge gap in this area. A significant proportion (40%) of respondents fell in the middle, indicating some familiarity with playful pedagogy.

Further analysis of familiarity based on geographical location and class level revealed interesting insights. Among teachers in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) teaching Junior/Senior infants and those in Northern Ireland (NI) teaching Primary 1-2, 58% indicated they were very familiar with playful pedagogy. In contrast, only 30% of teachers in ROI teaching 5th and 6th classes or NI teaching 7th and 8th classes felt similarly well-versed in playful pedagogy. This variation in familiarity may reflect differences in educational priorities and approaches across class levels.

Experience also played a role in teachers' familiarity with playful pedagogy. A majority (67%) of teachers with 0-5 years of experience reported being very familiar with playful pedagogy. In contrast, only 30% of teachers with 30 or more years of experience felt the same level of familiarity. The difference in responses here may reflect generational shifts in teaching methodologies and the evolving emphasis on innovative pedagogical practices in today's colleges of education.

Confidence in Incorporating Playful Pedagogy

The survey further assessed teachers' confidence in their ability to effectively incorporate playful pedagogy into their teaching, with responses ranging from 1 (little confidence) to 10 (very confident). The findings revealed that 37% of teachers felt very confident in their ability to integrate playful pedagogy, indicating a substantial level of self-assurance among a significant portion of the respondents. However, 12% of teachers reported having little confidence, suggesting room for improvement in building educators' confidence in this area. The majority (51%) of teachers fell in the middle, indicating a moderate level of confidence.

Incorporation of Playful Elements

To gauge the extent to which teachers currently incorporate play or playful elements into their teaching practices, respondents were asked to rate their incorporation level on a scale from 1 (little incorporation) to 10 (high level of incorporation). The results indicated a diverse range of practices among the surveyed teachers. Overall, 27% of teachers stated that they had a high level of incorporation, demonstrating a significant commitment to playful pedagogy. Conversely, 19% reported low levels of incorporation. 54% of teachers fell in the middle, indicating some level of play incorporation.

Beliefs About the Impact of Playful Pedagogy

Teachers' beliefs about the impact of playful pedagogy on pupil engagement and learning outcomes were also explored. When asked about the extent to which they believed playful pedagogy could enhance pupil engagement on a scale from 1 (little increase in engagement) to 10 (great increase in engagement), a substantial majority (75%) of teachers expressed confidence in its potential to lead to a great increase in pupil engagement. Only 25% believed that it would result in some increase in engagement.

Similarly, when asked about the effectiveness of playful pedagogy in improving pupil learning outcomes on a scale from 1 (little improvement to outcomes) to 10 (great improvement to outcomes), 68% of teachers believed that playful pedagogy would be very effective in improving learner outcomes, while 32% thought it would be somewhat effective.

Training in Playful Pedagogy

Finally, the survey investigated whether teachers had received explicit training in playful pedagogy. The results indicated that only 25% of teachers had received such training, while a substantial majority (75%) had not. This finding highlights an opportunity for educational institutions and professional development programs to prioritise training in playful pedagogy to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills needed for effective implementation.

2.3 Understanding Across Class Levels

Importance of Play

The perspectives of the teachers and school leaders who participated in this research shed light on the evolving role of playful pedagogy as children progress through different class levels. Respondents overwhelmingly acknowledged the importance of playful pedagogies at all class levels, with one teacher noting that *one is never too old to play*. Teachers working at all class levels identified that play is enjoyable for children of all ages, and that play helps children to be at their *most relaxed and creative*.

Several key benefits of using playful pedagogies were recognised by the respondents of this survey. The teachers were of the opinion that play empowered children to develop their language and problem-solving skills, allowed them to master motor movements, and enhanced their engagement in the classroom. Survey participants also noted that the interactive components of play aided the children in *learning to control their emotions and behaviours*.

Several teachers offered examples of effective use of playful pedagogies with older children, and noted their surprise at how effective and well received these activities were. While detailing their school's expansion of Aistear beyond the infant classes, one teacher remarked that *sometimes we forget how young these children are*.

Differing Levels of Play Across Class Levels

While respondents highlighted the importance and benefits of play for all children, many of the teachers surveyed agreed that while play was commonly seen in infant classrooms, the use of play as a pedagogy decreased as the children moved into the senior classes of primary school. Participants noted an *obvious emphasis on playful learning in the infant classrooms with a gradual decrease as children moved through the school*. Respondents identified that this shift away from playful learning began as early as *first class in many schools*.

Several teachers surveyed believed that there was a culture in some schools of discontinuing the use of playful pedagogies outside of the infant classrooms. Despite a significant number of the respondents identifying the importance of playful pedagogies, some participants expressed the view that *there can be an understanding that playfulness in learning needs to stop at a young age to allow for serious, measurable learning*, and that play is seen as *the remit for junior classes*.

Curriculum pressures and a lack of suitably designed resources for playful learning in the senior classes were further identified as possible reasons for this shift away from play. Participants believed that playful learning was overlooked in the senior classes due to *curriculum overload and pressure to tick all boxes*. Respondents who teach in a multi-grade setting also noted the difficulty of incorporating play while planning and delivering the curriculum for classroom with more than one class level. Teachers also stated that while there were a wide range of resources suitable for infant playful learning, they found it difficult to acquire resources for play for senior classes, and that schools tended to prioritise the infant classroom when providing toys and other play related resources.

Members of school management who participated in the survey believed that individual teacher strengths, preferences and knowledge also impacted on how often playful pedagogies were implemented, both at infant and senior class level. Given that a minority of the teachers surveyed reported feeling very confident in their ability to integrate playful pedagogies, it rings true that

individual teachers may have varying degrees of implementation in their classrooms, particularly in senior classrooms.

Conversely, several school leaders who participated in the survey believed there was no difference in how frequently playful pedagogies were used between infant and senior classes. While they noted that there may traditionally have been a focus on playful learning solely in the infant classroom, they observed a wide variety of playful pedagogies implemented at senior level. This opinion was echoed by several teachers as well. However, many of these respondents noted a significant change in the nature of play, as children move through primary school, stating that *play is very different between junior and senior classes*.

Changing Nature of Play Across Class Levels

A key difference identified between infant and senior classes, was the structure and formality of playful activities. Teachers described play in the infant classroom as imaginative, unstructured, child-led and natural, noting that *similar to their own play, playfulness is more imaginative in the early years*. On the contrary, playfulness in the senior classroom was considered to be structured, formal, creative, game-based and interest-based. Respondents further stated that *playful opportunities in senior classes needs to be structured and planned according to age group and class level to be able to engage students and encourage them*.

Subject suitability was recognised as an important factor when implementing playful pedagogies at a senior class level; respondents believed that certain subjects lend themselves to the use of playful pedagogies more than others. Drama, and Physical Education were identified as subjects where playful learning commonly took place.

Teachers believed that this shift towards more structured, subject-specific play reflected the changing interests and needs of the children as they grow and move through primary school. There were several components to this; firstly, respondents noted that *children desire imaginative play methods less as older children become more self-conscious and lose some sense of imagination*. Participants also noted how a change in pupils' play needs and desires within the school context could be influenced by external factors, and that *the pupils favour less co-operative play and more online gaming, reflective of their experiences of play at home*. Finally, teachers believed that play becomes more sophisticated and complex as children grow older, and that *the older children get ... more peer influenced, and that role model type of play becomes more prominent*.

2.4 Factors Affecting Implementation

The successful implementation of playful methodologies in the classroom is contingent upon several factors and can pose significant challenges for teachers. This section explores the respondents' views on issues that can arise when attempting to integrate playful methodologies into their teaching practice, while remaining mindful of school culture and assessment policies. These challenges encompass practical, logistical, attitudinal, and curriculum-related barriers that teachers must navigate to effectively incorporate playful pedagogy.

Practical Factors

The availability of resources, funding, and access to necessary materials for implementing playful methods, is seen as crucial. Participants reported that when their schools and classrooms were well-resourced, they felt confident in implementing playful pedagogies. Respondents believed that a *co-operative staff, who share resources and time, and a certain amount of resources available for playful learning*, were factors which increased their likelihood of utilising playful methodologies.

Insufficient resourcing and funding were seen by respondents as major barriers by teachers in the implementation of play in their classrooms. The majority of respondents felt under resourced in their classrooms. Teachers felt that schools can overvalue workbooks, with one respondent noting:

workbooks, workbooks ... no money given to teachers to spend in their classrooms for resources. Another teacher stated that workbooks hinder the time allocated to play methodologies ... if they are paid for, they are used. Teachers also identified *space constraints in the classroom* as being a barrier to playful learning.

Managing large class sizes, suitable learning spaces, and addressing challenging behaviours were seen to add further complexity to meaningful playful teaching and learning. Teachers reported that overseeing diverse behaviours, maintaining classroom discipline, and ensuring pupils remain engaged during playful activities can be demanding. Additionally, behavioural challenges, language barriers, and difficulties related to differentiation and inclusion were seen as specific obstacles by some respondents. Concerns about managing messiness, tidying play areas, and organising materials also presented as a challenge for a few teachers. Many teachers noted that they would be more confident in using playful learning if they had the support of additional personnel.

Attitudinal Factors

A teacher's own personal attitudes and beliefs about play has a significant impact on their implementation of playful methodologies. Some respondents reflected their *concerns about how effective the learning actually is for many children*, while others had concerns about their ability to use these practices in a competent and effective way.

School culture is seen to play a pivotal role in shaping respondents' willingness. Resistance from school management, colleagues, or the broader community, who may not fully appreciate or understand the significance of play in the learning process, was viewed as limiting teachers' ability to use playful methodologies. Respondents reported on school cultures where play was viewed as *a waste of time, that the children are not learning*. With that in mind, some respondents highlighted the presence of supportive cultures within their schools when it comes to playful methodologies and that the possibility of *reaching children who struggle to communicate and learn*, during playful activities, incentivised them to use playful methodologies.

Many respondents noted that the support for playful methodologies is particularly evident in the early years or junior classes. Responses indicated that playful methodologies were often *not supported past senior infant level*, primarily due to perceived resource limitations or doubts about their educational value.

The attitudes of parents regarding play in the classroom was another factor identified by respondents which could affect the creation of playful classrooms. Teachers believed that some parents do not understand the benefits of playful learning approaches and are resistant to a move away from more *traditional teaching approaches*.

Despite these attitudinal factors, many respondents highlighted that they persevere in implementing playful learning experiences. They reported being motivated by the overwhelming evidence of the benefits for the children which come from the use of playful methodologies.

Curriculum and Assessment-based Factors

Teachers who participated in the survey stated that they required adequate time for planning, preparation, and engagement in playful activities. Time constraints arising from curriculum demands were perceived as significant limiting factors. Teachers noted that the *pressure to cover the curriculum*, and the emphasis on measurable outcomes presented as substantial challenges. Notably, senior classes are particularly affected by the impact of the current standardised testing environment. The urgency to complete the *very high amount of workbooks*, meet assessment expectations, and prioritise core subjects can hinder the integration of playful techniques in senior primary classes.

School assessment policies also influence the implementing of playful teaching methodologies. Many survey participants highlighted that their school's assessment policies placed a strong emphasis on academic learning, formal tests, and paper-based assessments. One participant commented that the

policy of standardised tests undermines the use of playful methodologies. Some respondents observed that their school's assessment policies failed to specifically address play or playful methodologies at all, with schools often focusing on *assessment of learning rather than for learning*. This fixation on results-driven assessments may be acting as a barrier to the integration of playful teaching methods and the incorporating of playful assessment techniques into teachers' practice.

Conversely, some respondents indicated that their school's assessment policies encompassed teacher observation, questioning, conferences and work samples, which could provide support for assessing playful methodologies. These policies acknowledged a diverse range of assessment methods that supported children in demonstrating their knowledge through playful activities.

These findings show the multifaceted nature of the practical, logistical, attitudinal, and educational barriers that educators face when trying to implement playful methodologies within the classroom. Confronting these challenges may necessitate the provision of additional resources, enhanced support structures, targeted training, a deeper understanding of the value of play, and a shift in attitudes around the value of play for all primary students.

2.5 Playful Pedagogy – Training/CPD

Effective training and continuous professional development (CPD) are vital components for teachers seeking to implement playful pedagogy successfully. This section explores the preferences and expectations of educators regarding playful pedagogy training based on their responses to the question: "What would playful pedagogy training look like for you?" The findings reveal insights into the desired types of training that would support teachers to implement playful methodologies effectively.

A predominant theme among respondents was the emphasis on *practical and hands-on* training. Educators valued opportunities to experience firsthand the role of the teacher in playful pedagogy. They highlighted the importance of practical demonstrations of playful methodologies, observing experienced educators effectively using playful pedagogy in the classroom, and a desire for opportunities to try out playful methodologies in their own classrooms, learning through experimentation and reflection.

Teachers also stressed the importance of training that equipped them with a suite of resources and ideas to support curriculum delivery through playful methodologies. They highlighted the need for training that provided resources in alignment with the curriculum and practical strategies, lessons, and materials that were adaptable and applicable across diverse educational contexts.

Several respondents advocated for a balanced approach that combined theoretical understanding with practical implementation. They highlighted the importance of training that offers theoretical explanations of the benefits of playful pedagogy, providing educators with a solid understanding of its underlying principles, and training that focuses on exploring how playful pedagogy can be integrated across various curriculum subjects, *a mixture of theory and practice*.

Preferences for training modes varied among respondents, with some noting that *face to face training is essential*, while others preferred online courses. However, they shared common expectations. Regardless of the mode, training should encourage interaction and dialogue among educators. Collaborative encounters were seen as valuable for sharing ideas and experiences. Teachers value opportunities to collaborate with peers, fostering a community of practice that supports the implementation of playful pedagogy.

Building teacher confidence was a recurring theme in respondents' expectations for training. They sought training that focuses on the *empowerment of teachers to feel confident and supported*, and provided knowledge and resources needed to implement playful pedagogy effectively. Frequent refresher training was considered essential for sustained confident implementation.

Some respondents stressed the importance of training that was tailored to their specific school context. Participants identified the need for *ways to support playful pedagogy in a multi-class or Gaelscoil context*, and in all situations *where language for communication in school is different to home*.

A few respondents mentioned the need for training that addresses the assessment of playful methodologies. They were looking for methods to assess play effectively and demonstrate its impact on learning outcomes.

3. Conclusions and Recommendations

3.1 Conclusion

The INTO's exploration of playful pedagogy awareness among teachers on the island of Ireland provides valuable insights into the current landscape of awareness and challenges surrounding its implementation. The success of playful pedagogy hinges on educators' level of awareness of the benefits, their willingness to embrace it, and their confidence in incorporating it into their teaching. Additionally, their beliefs about its impact on pupil engagement and learning outcomes, as well as the availability of age-appropriate resources, training, and professional development, play pivotal roles in shaping the adoption of playful pedagogy.

It is clear that play as a pedagogy is not uniformly understood among primary teachers across Ireland. While a substantial portion of educators are familiar with the concept and express confidence in its potential, there are disparities in awareness levels based on experience, class level, and school setting. This points to a need for targeted awareness campaigns and professional development initiatives to bridge these knowledge gaps.

The findings indicate that there is room for improvement in building teachers' confidence in incorporating playful pedagogy into their teaching practices. While a significant number of teachers feel very confident, there is still a considerable proportion of teachers who do not feel confident in incorporating playful pedagogy in their teaching practice. This highlights the importance of providing educators with the necessary support and resources to enhance their confidence in using playful methodologies effectively.

Teachers' beliefs about the impact of playful pedagogy on pupil engagement and learning outcomes are largely positive. The majority of teachers believe that it can lead to a substantial increase in pupil engagement and significantly improve learning outcomes. This belief in the potential of playful pedagogy highlights its significance as a teaching approach that can positively impact the overall educational experience of pupils.

The survey also reveals that a significant portion of teachers have not received explicit training in playful pedagogy, indicating a gap in their professional development. There is a need for educational institutions and professional development programs to prioritise training in playful pedagogy to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills needed for its effective implementation.

This report highlights the potential of playful pedagogy as a valuable approach to engage pupils and improve learning outcomes. To fully harness its benefits, the relevant ROI/NI education authorities must address the disparities in awareness and confidence levels, provide targeted CPD opportunities, and create a more inclusive and effective educational environment that leverages the advantages of playful pedagogy for all pupils.

3.2 Recommendations

The INTO recommends that the relevant education departments in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland:

- 1- Design and implement targeted professional development programmes for teachers, especially those in senior classes and those teachers with less experience, to enhance their understanding and confidence in incorporating playful pedagogy into their teaching practices. These programmes should include face to face training, practical demonstrations, and collaborative learning opportunities.
- 2- Fund school resources that include a wide range of practical materials aligned with the primary ROI/NI curricula. This funding should be continually allocated to schools to support their implementation of playful pedagogy year on year.
- 3- Provide extra in-school leadership and management time, deputy principal release days and secretarial support to ensure that schools have sufficient resources and time to undertake any additional administrative work required to develop a culture that values playful pedagogy in their schools.
- 4- Continue to encourage the integration of playful pedagogy into the official curricula of ROI/NI. This should include providing guidelines on how to integrate playful elements across subjects and class levels, ensuring that playful pedagogy is recognised as a legitimate teaching approach for all primary school pupils.
- 5- Foster communities of practice among teachers to facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing. Teachers should be encouraged to share their experiences, success stories, and challenges related to playful pedagogy through regular meetings.
- 6- Develop advocacy initiatives to engage parents and the broader community in understanding the importance and benefits of playful pedagogy. Effective communication will help reduce parental resistance and promote a supportive school culture.
- 7- Provide guidance and training on assessment strategies for playful pedagogy. Teachers should be provided with training on how to assess play-based activities and how these activities impact on learning outcomes.

References

Bubikova-Moan, J., Naess Hjetland, H., & Wollscheid, S. (2019). ECE Teachers' Views on Play-Based Learning: A Systematic Review. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 27(6), 776–800.

Department of Education. *The Primary Curriculum Framework*. Government Publications. Retrieved 6 October 2023, from <https://www.curriculumonline.ie/Primary/The-Primary-Curriculum-Framework/>

Gray, C., & Ryan, A. (2016). Aistear vis-à-vis the Primary Curriculum: The experiences of early years teachers in Ireland. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 24(2), 188–205. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2016.1155973>

Johnston, O., Wildy, H., & Shand, J. (2023). Teenagers learn through play too: Communicating high expectations through a playful learning approach. *Australian Educational Researcher (Springer Science & Business Media B.V.)*, 50(3), 921–940. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-022-00534-3>

Walsh, G. M., McGuinness, C., Sproule, L., & Trew, K. (2010). Implementing a play-based and developmentally appropriate curriculum in Northern Ireland primary schools: What lessons have we learned? *Early Years*, 30(1), 53–66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09575140903442994>

Appendices

Appendix A A Study of Playful Pedagogy Awareness among INTO Members

Appendix A

A Study of Playful Pedagogy Awareness among INTO Members

Playful Pedagogy Awareness Survey

There are 3 sections in this Survey.

Privacy and Consent: This will provide information on why we are doing this survey and why we are asking you to take part. You will be asked if you agree to participate in this survey.

Background information / School profile: This section consists of a set of 7 multiple choice questions. This section is intended to help build an understanding of the profile of members participating in the study and their school setting.

Survey Questions: This section consists of 14 questions that seek to elicit answers for the Education Committee's research questions on the topic of playful pedagogy awareness in primary schools:

- *What do teachers understand about playful pedagogy, and how does this understanding vary across different class levels?*
- *What are the factors that influence teachers' willingness and ability to implement playful pedagogy, such as school culture, parental expectations, and assessment policies?*
- *What are the challenges and barriers that teachers may encounter when trying to implement playful pedagogy, and how can they be overcome?*

* Required

Privacy and Consent

Why are we doing this research?

This research is being carried out by the Education Committee of the INTO in preparation for the 2023 Education Conference. The purpose of this research is to gain information on primary school teachers' awareness of playful pedagogies across all class levels focusing on the factors that influence teachers' willingness and ability to implement playful pedagogy and the challenges and barriers that teachers may encounter when trying to implement playful pedagogies. The survey will be sent to a randomised selection of INTO members in Ireland (North & South).

Why have you been asked to take part in this survey?

We are inviting you to take part in this research because we want to seek feedback from those who are directly involved in educating primary level children to gain further insight in relation to playful pedagogy awareness among primary teachers.

Do I have to take part?

No. Participation in this survey is voluntary. You can withdraw up until the point at which you submit your response. After submission, the option to withdraw will no longer be possible.

Will my information be kept confidential?

All information you provide, and the answers you give in the survey, will be kept confidential and protected, and all data will be anonymised in any research outputs. The data gathered will be securely stored on password protected computers and only be available to the research team. On

completion of the research, data will be kept for a minimum of ten years and then destroyed. *What will happen with the answers I provide in this survey:*

The information you provide may contribute to research publications and/or conference presentations/seminars. However, no names or identifying information would be included in any publications or presentations/seminars based on the data gathered, and your responses to this survey will remain confidential.

Questions or concerns:

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you can contact Máirín Ni Chéileachair, the Assistant General Secretary/Director of Education, Research and Learning at mnic@into.ie.

1. By clicking "Agree" you are saying, I have read the above statement. I understand that my participation in this survey is voluntary. I am over 18 years of age.*

Agree

Background Information / School Profile:

2. Gender Identity (Please select all that apply)*

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary
- Gender neutral
- Transgender
- Gender fluid
- Other
- Prefer not to say

3. Your role or class level in your school? (select multiple answers if required)*

Please select at most 5 options.

- Early Years Setting
- ROI Junior/Senior Infants or NI Primary 1/2
- ROI 1st/2nd Class or NI Primary 3/4 ROI 3rd/4th Class or NI Primary 5/6
- ROI 5th/6th Class or NI Primary 7/Year 8
- SET/Special Education Setting
- School Management
- Other

4. Please indicate how many years' experience you have in teaching.*

- 0-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21-25
- 26-30
- 30+

5. Please indicate the number of students you teach. (Administrative Management can skip)
 - 1-15
 - 16-20
 - 21-25
 - 26-30
 - 30+
6. Where is your school located?
 - City
 - Town
 - Suburban
 - Rural
7. Is your school in receipt of DEIS or Social Deprivation funding?
 - Yes
 - No
8. Please indicate the type of school you teach in.
 - Single Sex (Girls)
 - Single Sex (Boys)
 - Co-Educational

Survey Questions

9. How familiar are you with the concept of 'playful pedagogy'? (1 = no familiarity and 10 = Very Familiar)*
10. What does the term "playful pedagogy" mean to you?*
11. In your opinion, how does the level of playfulness differ between different class levels/age groups?
12. What factors influence your willingness to implement playful methodologies in your classroom?
13. What challenges have you encountered when trying to implement playful methodologies in the classroom?
14. How does your school's culture support or hinder your ability to use playful methodologies in your teaching?
15. How does your school's assessment policy support or hinder your ability to use playful methodologies in your teaching?
16. How confident do you feel in your ability to effectively incorporate playful pedagogy in your teaching? (1 = Little Confidence, 10 = Very Confident)*
17. To what extent do you currently incorporate play or playful elements into your teaching practices? (1 = Little Incorporation, 10 = High level of Incorporation)*
18. To what extent do you believe that playful pedagogy can enhance student engagement in the classroom? (1 = Little Increase in Engagement, 10 = Great Increase in Engagement)*

19. To what extent do you believe that playful pedagogy can be effective in improving student learning outcomes?(1 = Little Improvement to Outcomes, 10 = Great Improvement to Outcomes)*
20. Have you received explicit training on the use of playful pedagogies?*

 - Yes
 - No

21. What would playful pedagogy training look like for you?
22. Any further comments?