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Playful pedagogy for deeper learning: exploring the implementation of the play-based foundation phase in Wales

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ABSTRACT
The Welsh foundation phase is a play-based curriculum for 3–7-year-olds advocating outdoor and experiential approaches to learning. Play-based outdoor learning increases interaction with a range of affordances giving opportunities for movement in learning. Children assign activities as either play or not play-based on a series of cues. Teaching approaches that incorporate cues associated with play can influence pupil engagement and involvement in learning. This paper draws on data from a three-year study of the implementation of the foundation phase. Analysis of data from observations, field notes and video suggest pupils were more involved in tasks with higher levels of well-being when tasks were perceived as play. Leavres suggests increased involvement in learning may result in deeper learning.

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Introduction

The Foundation Phase in Wales is a playbased curriculum for 3–7-year-olds similar to a growing international trend that sees a move from traditional subjects to more authentic areas of learning (DCELLS, 2015). The Welsh Government highlights the importance of play in the Foundation Phase as a way 'children become self-aware', 'learn social rules' as well as being 'fundamental to intellectual development' (DCELLS, 2015, p. 6). Existing literature has sought to examine the pedagogical role of adults in children's play (Fleer, 2015), interpretation of tasks as play (Howard, 2002; Howard & McInnes, 2013; Howard, Bellin, & Rees, 2002) and children's perspectives on play and learning (Pyle & Alaca, 2018).

To contribute to this discourse, this paper presents findings from part of a study that sought to explore the interpretation and delivery of the Foundation Phase in Wales. The paper firstly examines experiential learning in relation to the Foundation Phase as a play-based curriculum, in particular it focuses on the relationship between play, affordances, motivation and engagement in learning and how this relates to children's perceptions of a task. Drawing on the findings from the study and existing literature, this paper suggests that by using experiential approaches to learning pupils are more likely to interpret tasks as play and as such have greater engagement and deeper involvement in the learning.

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The Foundation Phase, experiential learning and play

The Foundation Phase framework advocates an experiential, play-based approach to learning in which practitioner-directed activities are balanced with those initiated by children and the outdoor environment is an integral part of the children's learning and experience (DCELLS, 2015; Maynard, Waters, & Clement, 2011; Wainwright, Goodway, Whitehead, Williams, & Kirk, 2016). The Foundation Phase framework identifies seven areas of learning which are not approached in isolation but form part of a holistic, integrated and cross-curricular approach with an emphasis on the development of skills (DCELLS, 2015). The seven areas of learning are:

- Personal and Social Development, Well-Being and Cultural Diversity
- Language, Literacy and Communication Skills
- Mathematical Development
- Welsh Language Development
- Knowledge and Understanding of the World
- Physical Development
- Creative Development

(DCELLS, 2008, p. 2).

This approach means that subjects in their traditional form no longer exist, such as the subject of Science which would now be covered in the area of Knowledge and Understanding of the World. During the conceptualization of the Foundation Phase, ministers observed curriculum models, which have influenced educational practice and approaches internationally such as *High-Scope*, *Reggio Emilia*, and *Te Whāriki*. These are all open curricular approaches and as such emphasize active participatory learning, interaction, reasoning, reflection and responsibility for self-learning (Anning & Edwards, 1999; Epstein, 2013). These approaches are reflected in Government documentation which advocates an approach where 'children learn through first-hand experiential activities with the serious business of "play" providing the vehicle' (DCELLS, 2015, p. 4). As a play-based curriculum the interpretation of play in the Foundation Phase is not clearly defined and perhaps most useful for the context of the Foundation Phase as a play-based curriculum is Pellegrini's (1991, p. 215) notion of a continuum suggesting 'acts should not be categorized as "play" or "not play": they should be related along a continuum from "pure play" to "non play"'. This idea of a continuum has also been advocated more recently by Pyle and Daniels (2017) and works well for the Foundation Phase where children move from adult-led activities to more freely chosen tasks and even many of the teacher-led tasks are playful in their nature. Wood and Attfield (2005, p. 5) maintain the challenge of defining play is because 'play is always context dependent'. Dewey's work of the 1930s highlighted the importance of context in relation to experience and the important responsibility of educators to recognize surroundings that 'are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth' (1938, p. 40).

The environment is an important factor in relation to engagement in learning where in order for motivation, development and performance to be maximized, the social context needs to satisfy the 'basic psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy' (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991, p. 327). Autonomy supportive teachers induce greater intrinsic motivation, curiosity and a desire for challenge, whilst students who are overly controlled lose initiative and learn less well (Benware & Deci, 1984; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Grolnick, 1986). Motivation is strongly related to engagement as Reeve *et al*. (2004, p. 147) explain when they describe engagement as 'the behavioural intensity and emotional quality of a person's active involvement during a task' highlighting its 'many interrelated expressions of motivation, such as intrinsically motivated behaviour, self-determined extrinsic motivation, work orientation and mastery motivation'. Engagement can be described as the level of participation and intrinsic motivation that a pupil shows in their task, and is a combination of behaviours such as persistence, effort and attention and attitudes such as motivation, interest, enthusiasm, positive learning values and pride in success (Akey, 2006; Laevers, 1993;

Newmann, 1992). A growing body of research suggests engagement is associated with achievement in standardized tests and more favourable lifelong outcomes (Marks, 2000; Taylor & Nelms, 2006). Reeve (2006, p. 225) claims that 'students' classroom engagement depends in part on the supportive quality of the classroom climate in which they learn' and that 'teachers most engage students when they offer high levels of both autonomy support and structure'' This is of particular relevance to the Foundation Phase with its combination of adult-led and child-initiated learning, which according to Reeve (2006), should result in high levels of student engagement.

Csikszentmihalyi's concept of 'flow' (1979, 1989) has often been linked to engagement in a task (Harmer & Cates, 2004; Laevers, 1994). The concept of 'flow' develops an understanding of 'experiences during which individuals are fully involved in the present moment' (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002, p. 89). Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2002, p. 90) explain how individuals in a state of flow describe how 'an experience seamlessly enfolds from minute to minute' and identify characteristics of the state as 'intense and focused concentration on what one is doing in the present moment'. Akey (2006) suggests being in a state of flow indicates enjoyment of learning. Laevers (1994) in his theory of experiential education explains how deep immersion in learning has an affective component, and he recognizes the combination of behavioural and affective components as involvement and well-being. Laevers (1997, p. 2) suggests that involvement is seen as an indication for changes that are defined as 'deep level learning' (Laevers, 1997, p. 2) and in order to gain an insight into high quality learning environments developed the Leuven Involvement and Well-Being Scale (Laevers, 1994). Subsequent studies have shown pupils' involvement is dependent on the 'interactions between the context (including the way teachers handle their group) and the characteristics of the children' (Laevers, 2000, p. 25). Large studies of effective early learning with 60,000 pre-primary age children show that the more competent the teacher, the higher the level of involvement and well-being (Laevers, 2011; Laevers et al., 2005; Pascal & Bertram, 1995; Pascal, Bertram, Mould, & Hall, 1998) implying teacher competence is synonymous with promoting autonomous behaviours and decision-making in children. Laevers (2000, p. 25) however cautions that this state of involvement is not easily obtained as it 'only occurs in the small area in which the activity matches the capabilities of the person'. He suggests that 'young children usually find it in play' and it is in play that we see an 'exploratory attitude, defined by openness for, and alertness to, the wide variety of stimuli that form our surroundings'. This attitude enables a person to find 'the most intense forms of concentration and involvement' and it is this attitude underpinned by deep intrinsic motivation that keeps a person learning and developing (Laevers, 2000, p. 25). The challenge for education is to keep this intrinsic source of motivation alive as a wealth of existing research shows that intrinsic motivation declines as children progress through the education system (Anderman & Maehr, 1994; Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried, 2001; Opdenakker, Maulana, & den Brok, 2012).

The links between play and high levels of involvement and intrinsic motivation have been well documented (Brock, Dodds, Jarvis, & Olusoga, 2009; Brooker & Edwards, 2010; Howard, 2002; Howard & McInnes, 2010, p. 2011; Moyles, 2010), however Wood and Attfield (2005, p. 7) warn of 'the danger of overlooking the fact that children have their own definitions of play'. This is highlighted in the work of McInnes, Howard, Miles, and Crowley (2011) who studied children's approaches to activities and proposed that children make their own distinctions between work and play. It is also useful to consider the internally driven affective quality of play that has such an important role in motivation and engagement (Moyles, 1989). Although Feezell (2013) and Dewey (1933) both acknowledged an attitudinal component in play, Dewey (1933, p. 210) made a distinction between playfulness and play where 'the former is an attitude of mind; the latter is an outward manifestation of this attitude'. Howard and McInnes (2010, p. 34) highlight that playfulness implies freedom and flexibility and suggest that 'viewing playfulness, as an attitude of mind, rather than play, the outward act, may be the most helpful way yet of thinking about this elusive concept and of providing a theoretical basis for implanting a play-based curriculum' such as the Foundation Phase. They further propose that utilizing a concept of play which is based on children's perceptions highlighting

playfulness as an approach and attitude to an activity may help to develop practitioners understanding of play (Howard & McInnes, 2010).

Howard and McInnes's (2010, p. 35) work highlights how children make the distinction between play and not play 'enabling them to map activities on a play-work continuum' (McInnes et al., 2011, p. 123) with clear cues illustrated in Table 1.

This distinction that children make between play and work is of particular importance as 'children who practice a task under playful practice conditions (on the floor, adult nearby, choice) show superior performance and behaviours conducive to learning compared with children in a formal practice condition (at a table, adult present, no choice)' (McInnes, Howard, Miles, & Crowley, 2009, p. 124). McInnes et al. (2009, p. 122) propose from their research that it is not whether the activity is playing or not is the issue, but rather 'the playful approach and attitude that is taken to an activity'. This is highly relevant to the Foundation Phase, as teachers need to ensure pupils are learning in a structured environment and this will inevitably reduce the opportunities for 'pure play' as described in Pellegrini's (1991) continuum. Although the experiences in the Foundation Phase are in the main structure in the sense that they are conceived, designed and introduced by teachers, it is the ability of the children to make choices about how they engage with these experiences that allow them to conceive of their learning experiences as playful. This notion of playful practice allows children to learn in a way that they perceive as play, thus maintaining motivation and engagement in the task. It is clear in the table that choice and autonomy are cues, which children relate to play. As autonomy is strongly associated with intrinsic motivation this has clear implications for levels of motivation and engagement (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009).

As shown in table one the cues children use are based on environmental factors such as location and the presence of an adult, and emotional factors such as choice of the activity. McInnes et al. (2011, p. 123) suggest that it is the use of these cues that enables children to 'map activities on a play-work continuum'. McInnes et al. (2011) draw on Gibson's (1986) theory of affordances in their discussions relating to environmental cues whereas Fiskum and Jacobsen (2013, p. 77) explain 'an affordance is an incentive to action'. Kyttä (2002) and Fjørtoft (2001) in studying affordances in children's environments identify how the physical environment offers different modes of play, such as space and smooth surfaces afford running and cycling, and trees afford climbing and swinging, whist shelters offer peace and quiet. The concept of affordances of the environment is of particular relevance as they suggest cues for children in relation to their activity. The environment can therefore be manipulated to form cues children use to define play and as such create playful conditions which 'impacts on performance, behaviour and learning' (McInnes et al., 2009; cited in McInnes et al., 2011, p. 123). Papatheodorou (2010, p. 145) argues that spaces 'shape and condition how we feel, think and behave', therefore by manipulating these cues practitioners can work to co-construct a learning environment that 'reduces the cue distinctions, blurs the boundaries between play and not play and engenders playfulness' (Howard & McInnes, 2010, p. 37). Young children in action need spaces arranged and equipped to promote active learning and the Foundation Phase advocates a well-planned space to be a learning environment giving many opportunities for children to develop through both child-initiated and adult-led play activities (DCELLS, 2015; Hohmann, Weikart, & Epstein, 2002). If, as evidence suggests, the organization of the whole school space,

Table 1. Cues that children use to distinguish between play and work.

Play		Work	
Emotional cues	Environmental cues	Emotional cues	Environmental cues
Voluntary	On the floor	Compulsory	At a table
Under child's control Easy	Lacks adult involvement No adult evaluation Can be continued-focus on the process	Under adult control Hard	Includes adult involvement Includes adult evaluation Has to finish-focus on the product
Fun	Physical	Can be fun	Not physical

Source: Howard & McInnes (2010, p. 35).

including the outdoor space as well as the classroom, the resources and the design of educational spaces, affect children's learning and how they perceive an activity, then the management of these spaces as well as the tasks is crucial to allowing children autonomy in their learning and creating an ethos of playfulness (Howard & McInnes, 2013; McInnes et al., 2011; Papatheodorou & Ramasut, 1994; Penrose, Thomas, & Greed, 2001).

Study design

Research question

This paper reports on data from a large three-phase complementarity mixed-methods design which sought to understand the interpretation and implementation of the Foundation Phase in Wales. Part of this study, reported in this paper, sought to explore pupil engagement in learning. Specifically, it asked what were the levels of pupils' involvement and engagement in activities in the Foundation Phase?

Participants

Two schools were selected for the study through 'reputational case sampling' (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 74) on the basis of recognition of high-quality Foundation Phase provision as identified by government school inspectors and advisors. The selection process involved ESTYN Inspection Reports, Local Authority Self Evaluation Reports, Higher Education Partnerships, and the acknowledgement from the wider professional community. School A was situated in a small rural village in West Wales. Pupils attended from a catchment area that was neither economically or socially disadvantaged. There were 143 pupils on roll taught in six classes. 18% of pupils had additional learning needs and approximately 7% of pupils were entitled to free schools meals. School B was situated in a large town in West Wales. Pupils attended from an urban catchment where approximately half of the school's intake came from economically disadvantaged areas. About 40% of the pupils were entitled to free school meals, which was much higher than the average for Wales (21%). The school had 400 pupils on roll in 15 mainstream classes and 2 special units that cater for pupils with complex needs. The school identified 34% of pupils as having additional learning needs, which is well above the average for primary schools (22%). Both schools had large outdoor spaces for the pupils to access at playtime. A year one class (children aged five and six years old) from each school was selected for the study. The year one class in school A had 23 pupils (13 girls and 10 boys) in total and the year one class in school B had 26 pupils (14 girls and 12 boys) in total ($N = 49$). The classrooms in both schools also opened into an outdoor learning area that was accessed during teaching times.

Methodology

The Foundation Phase as a naturalistic intervention is multi-layered and complex. In order to gain a deep understanding of the complexities of the curriculum the research required a mixed-methods pragmatist approach which combined methods from quantitative and qualitative paradigms in a complementarity mixed-method design. This enabled the study to measure overlapping but also different facets of children's learning. In order to answer the research question reported in this paper, quantitative and qualitative data were generated with the Leuven Involvement scale. Additional qualitative data were generated with field note observations and video.

The Leuven Involvement Scale for Young Children (LIS-YC) is part of the SiCs self-evaluation instrument and has been devised as an assessment tool for identifying deep level learning (Laevers, 1994). 'The concept of involvement represents one of the central axes in experiential theory' (Laevers, 1997, p. 4). Work by Laevers (1993, p. 1994) to operationalize this notion resulted in the construction of the Leuven Involvement Scale (LIS). The Leuven Involvement Scale for young children (the LIS-YC) is a

five-point scale and focuses on young children (three to six years.). During the rating process a series of signals are attended to concentration, energy, complexity and creativity, facial expression and posture, persistence, precision, reaction time, verbal utterances and satisfaction (Laevers, 1997). The key aspect of the scale is the five levels of involvement. Level one means: no activity; Level two: frequently interrupted activity; Level three: more or less continuous activity; Level four: activity with intense moments, Level five: sustained intense activity (Laevers, 1994). The LIS-YC was used to observe the level of involvement and as such pupils' engagement in their learning during various tasks and activities in the Foundation Phase. The observations were carried out when the researcher saw an appropriate opportunity with pupils working in groups. There was no pre-determined time allocated for the observations. The observations were carried out as per the manual during activities that were 'the normal course of affairs' (Laevers et al., 2005, p. 2). The group size observed ranged from three to nine pupils.

Throughout the study, field notes were written both in situ and also away from the situation. Immediacy in recording field notes helped to overcome problems of reliability whilst writing some field notes later helped to ensure there was 'a detailed record of both objective observations and subjective feelings' (Spradley, 1980, p. 58) and maintain a high level of reflexivity. Pages and lines in the field note journals were numbered clearly in order to have a clear trail of all comments back to their source throughout the process of analysis with a total of 281 pages of field notes. Pseudonyms have been used for participants in the reporting of data to ensure anonymity.

Video recording was used to complement participant observations and field notes. For the purpose of this study, the emphasis was on the use of video to capture the context of the Foundation Phase in particular when many different activities were happening. This allowed for field notes to still be written and be complemented by film footage. A total of 89 videos were taken.

Analysis

Leuven Scale observations measured the levels of pupil engagement in learning to give a score for involvement. A chi-squared analysis was also undertaken to examine if engagement levels were different if the teacher selected the task or the child selected the task.

Qualitative data were analysed using the constant comparative method of inductive data analysis, first developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and drawn upon by Maykut and Morehouse (1994). This process involved the identification of units of meaning within the data. These were compared to other units and where similarities occurred, grouped into clusters of relevant meaning. From these clusters of relevant meaning, categories and themes emerged. Videos were analysed through a similar process. The footage was coded and labelled into themes.

Mixed-method research requires the analysis of data from multiple methods during the analysis stage and not just at the interpretation stage (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989). Data Consolidation/Merging is the 'joint review of both data types to create new or consolidated variables or data sets' (Caracelli & Greene, 1993, p. 235). In the study, video footage was analysed alongside Leuven observations and field notes to create qualitative narratives for further analysis and interpretation.

Limitations

The sample of two classes from two schools in West Wales cannot be viewed as representative of Foundation Phase classes across Wales. Schools were selected on the basis of being recognized for their good practice in the implementation of the Foundation Phase in order to gain an understanding of the impact of the curriculum when implemented well. Data were generated over a year in the two schools with in-depth analysis of multiple methods and as such does give some in-depth insight into the experiences of the pupils and the playful pedagogical practices in the schools. However, the findings reported in the following section should be considered with limitations of sample size in mind.

Findings and discussion

As might be expected in a play-based curriculum high levels of engagement were noted, in particular in choice activities and activities that children perceived as play. Table 2 shows the scores for observations using the Leuven Involvement Scale.

The mean score of 3.7 indicates that children had high levels of involvement in their learning as can be seen in Table 3. 58.09% of all the observations were scored in the high / very high category and only 16.1% were in the very low/ low category. These findings were high in relation to previous research where post-test scores after an intervention to improve involvement were 3.47 (Laevers, Declercq, & Thomas, 2010).

Part of the Leuven Involvement scale includes qualitative observations. These qualitative comments were also noted which recorded some of the behaviours that led to the scores. An example of qualitative comments from one observation is shown in Table 4.

A chi-squared analysis was undertaken to examine if engagement levels were different if the teacher selected the task or the child selected the task. The categories of very low and low were combined and high and very high were combined in order to have large enough numbers of the Chi-squared analysis although two cells were still below five. The chi-squared analysis found higher levels of engagement in tasks that the child selected with significance of $p = .021$. The data indicating higher levels of involvement when the task was chosen by the pupil and not teacher-directed are shown in Table 5.

This finding supports the previous findings of Deci and Ryan (1985) and Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, and Leone (1994, p. 123) who define autonomy support as valuing 'self-initiation', 'children's choice, independent problem solving, and participation in decision making', and is strongly associated with intrinsic motivation. Pupil choice, experimentation and self-initiation are features of an autonomy-supportive climate (Hastie, Rudisill, & Wadsworth, 2013; Reeve & Jang, 2006). The data from the Leuven Involvement scale observations support this. Activities that were chosen by the children were seen to have higher levels of involvement in the task. Pupils were clearly more motivated and engaged when they had selected the task.

The findings from qualitative observations were analysed to complement the quantitative data. There were numerous examples from observations in field notes that commented on pupil engagement across a range of activities, 'Katy is involved in her Picasso portrait focused and getting on – continuing work she has already begun. The writing group also all engaged' (Field notes p6, L10).

Table 2. Leuven Involvement scale.

	Total	Score 5 Extremely high	Score 4 High	Score 3 Moderate	Score 2 Low	Score 1 Extremely low	Mean score
No. of obs	56	17	16	14	8	1	3.7
% of obs	100	30.4	28.6	25	14.3	1.8	

Table 3. Percentage of observations in each category of the Leuven Involvement scale.

Category of involvement score	High / very high engagement 4 and 5	Moderate engagement 3	Low / very low engagement 1 and 2
Percentage of observations	59	25	16

Table 4. Qualitative comments for a Leuven Involvement observation.

Persists throughout despite some distractions
Tongue out with concentration
Finished activity and put it away
Focused on the story and discussing it, remarkable as she is EAL (English as an additional language)
Fetching resources

Table 5. Involvement scores percentage per category.

	Involvement			
Task	Very low/low involvement (%)	Moderate involvement (%)	High/very high involvement (%)	Total
Directed	24.1	34.5	41.4	100.0%
Choice	7.4	14.8	77.8	100.0%

As identified in the Leuven involvement observations high levels of engagement were particularly evident in child choice activities with field notes and video footage highlighting this 'children are all engaged and busy in a whole range of activities' (Field notes p90, L17; Video 4) and 'all children very focused on tasks and play' (Field notes p91, L20). Reflections in field notes commented on how it was 'quite remarkable to see how busy, focused and engaged the children were during the free choice time' (Field notes p92, L11).

There were observed exceptions when pupils were 'all engaged except Jo who is day dreaming' (Field Notes p9,L1). 'Jim fussing with his knee' (Field notes p86, L13) 'Chris fidgets, moves from his place he is only child not focusing on the story' (Field notes p133, L5) 'Jim doesn't seem to be doing as he is supposed to – he lies on top of the sandpit!' (Field notes p161, L20).

Although there were exceptions, as the Leuven observation data and field notes show, the consistent theme with this play-based active approach was high levels of engagement by the majority of pupils most of the time. Although the data show that when teachers made the choice of activity the children were less engaged, the levels of engagement were still high with 76.9% of observations for the teacher-directed tasks still in the moderate to very high levels of engagement categories.

This high level of engagement even in teacher-directed activities may have been related to the playful nature of the tasks. Despite being teacher-directed many activities included cues that children associate with play (Howard & McInnes, 2010). In particular tasks were often outside, fun and involved being able to move around during their activities. A particular example of this was during an outdoor session that included teacher-directed challenges. Children were able to choose from a variety of activities related to the theme of stones. One of the challenges was focusing on the area or learning of Knowledge and Understanding of the World and was called 'can you make a stone float?' Notes from video footage showed how the children engaged with the task

> the group have decided to make boats for the stones. They collect containers of different sizes and materials and try them out with small stones. One of them works and stays afloat. They are very excited and show the teacher. She asks them if it will move, so they blow it and it travels across the tough tray full of water without capsizing. (Video 1)

It is clear from the analysis of the video footage that the children were very focused on the task and soon others come over to observe and join in. The role of the teacher in these choice sessions was that of facilitator and she continued to ask questions to challenge them 'do you think you can put more stones in there? Or a larger stone? The children who have just joined the group are excited, one jumps up and down and rushes to fetch more stones' (Video 1). The task and environment had many of the cues Howard and ||McInnes (2010, p. 2013) suggest pupils identify as play such as outside, physical and fun. Also evident here was the 'children's willingness to engage with their teachers during playful activities' (Pyle & Alaca, 2018) which enabled the teacher to ensure appropriate learning for the pupils in the class. Despite the pupils in year one being aged only five and six years old, they remained engaged in the task of experimenting with making stones float for a sustained period of time clearly enjoying the task.

Another example which illustrated the integrated and cross-curricular approach of the Foundation Phase was a literacy session in the woods that involved collecting and sorting natural materials to make a collage of 'Stick Man' from a story the class were reading. Again data from field notes and video identify cues that children associate with play (Howard & McInnes, 2010; 2013), despite the session being a teacher-directed activity. 'The children are all in wet weather gear and head off in pairs and small groups to collect sticks, leaves, pine cones and acorns to make a picture, two are

playing on logs like stepping stones jumping and stepping, the rest are all busy on task' (Field notes, p48 L9). Again the comments show how the playful nature of a task maintains pupils' engagement in the activity. Analysis of film footage of the session also highlights this as

> all pupils are engaged in the task, they run in many directions and collect items from all over the small area of woodland, some are sorting out the materials they have collected and others are making pictures. The staff are asking them about the things they have collected. Some of the children can identify pine cones and acorns. (Video 9)

Again here it is evident that the adults are providing opportunities for pupils to learn in playful contexts (Pyle & Alaca, 2018) which ensures that there are high levels of pupil engagement in learning.

Conclusion

The findings reported in this paper support existing literature suggesting play is strongly associated with pupils' motivation and engagement in learning (Brock et al., 2009; Brooker & Edwards, 2010; Howard et al., 2002; Howard & McInnes, 2010; Moyles, 2010). It would seem that pupils' perceptions of a task as play or work can be highly influential on their motivation to engage in a task and Howard and McInnes's (2010, 2011) work suggest that pupils make these judgements about the nature of a task based on a series of environmental and emotional cues. It is therefore important that teachers have a knowledge and understanding of these cues when planning learning tasks and environments for their pupils. If teachers are able to devise playful approaches in their practice pupils will perceive an activity as play or playful in nature and as such are likely to be more engaged in the task. Experiential learning approaches exhibit cues that children associate with play such as being physical, outdoors, and involving choice. Therefore by adopting approaches that are experiential and autonomy-supportive teachers can develop a playful pedagogy that results in high levels of pupil engagement and, according to Laevers (1997), result in deeper learning.

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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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