

# smalltalk

Wales PPA's members' magazine

SUMMER 2015 Issue 118 £7.00



## Foundation Phase

Curriculum developments  
you need to know

## Schemas

The benefits of identifying  
play behaviour

## Skogsmulle

A forest creature is helping  
children learn



Wales *Pre-school  
Providers* Association  
Cymdeithas *Darparwyr  
Cyn-ysgol* Cymru



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government



WIN

Hanging number cookies

12

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## Meet the contributors

### Deborah Fielden

Deborah is a freelance early years consultant working with practitioners, settings and families in a variety of ways.



### Darren Lewis

Darren is a consultant Mindstretchers trainer, level four forest school trainer, passionate about the outdoors and founder of Cyfleon.



### Jane Alexander

Jane is our chief executive officer and has over 25 years of childcare experience, most recently working for Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs.



Your invite to join the board of trustees and the AGM can be found in the centre pages.





# Welcome to the summer edition of *small*talk

Summer is finally here. We can't wait to have a well-earned rest and bask in sunshine, but before we do we'd like to tell you all about what's inside your edition of *small*talk.

To sum things up in a summery summary: we have a mix of yours and our news, an update on changes within the Foundation Phase and some in-depth features on children's emotional wellbeing and everyone's favourite topic: play.

In more detail: on pages 4 and 5 we find out about a setting's recent Ofsted inspection, the Care Council for Wales update us on early years qualifications and their new resource, and our chief exec informs you on current projects here at Wales PPA.

For Foundation Phase: Talking Point, Kelcie Hurley shows you changes in the early years curriculum in the coming months and how they affect you and your setting. There's a useful flowchart for you to visualise developments.

In our special feature this

quarter we welcome the return of Deborah Fielden who has written an interesting piece on schemas: what they are, how to identify them and how they can help you in your work.

Do you know what Skogsmulle is? Well we didn't either until the people at Cyfleon Ltd got in touch. It's a forest creature that teaches children in Sweden. Intrigued? Flip to pages 12 and 13 to find out more.

There are these articles and much more, so before you head to the beach pack your copy to soak in the info as well as the sun. Oh, and don't forget to enter our comp on page 18: you could win one of four sets of Hanging Number Cookies. You can't eat them, mind.

## Enjoy!

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# Outstanding setting

## Sandra Hayward discusses the recent Ofsted result for Border Pre-school

We at Border Pre-School in Llanymynech, on the Powys/Shropshire borders, are celebrating our recent Ofsted result of 'Outstanding'.

The group is led by myself and Wendy Mottershead; we have been

inspector also commented on such well-behaved children.

Ofsted said, "The pre-school is a haven of excitement and enjoyment. Staff create an enchanting family atmosphere that encourage children to learn."

“The pre-school is a haven of excitement and enjoyment.”

at the setting for some 23 years and it was established 30 years ago. We are a part of a team of staff that have a genuine love of early years. Our staff help create an atmosphere where children feel safe, happy and are ready to learn.

The announcement of the inspection result was quickly followed by tears of joy from staff. It's just nice to have recognition for all of our hard work, we have certainly seen lots of changes over the years now we can say we are at the height of our careers.

During the inspection the staff's knowledge of safeguarding was key. As was our high quality child observations that clearly shows a child's starting point, tracking of development and next steps for learning, which are shared with parents and carers. The Ofsted

The full report can be found on the Ofsted Inspector's website using the unique reference (URN) 224049.

We really are lucky to have a first class quality pre-school that serves the local community. ■

### SANDRA HAYWARD

Leader  
Border Pre-School  
Llanymynech



## Care Council for Wales update

### Sandie Grieve provides info and clarification relating to childcare qualifications and discusses a new resource

An updated version of the List of Required Qualifications to work within the early years and childcare sector in Wales is now available. An interactive FAQ document has also been developed.

The minor changes include clarity on questions and queries that have been raised by managers in the sector. For example, the DNN (Diploma in Nursery Nursing), commonly known as the NNEB, remains as a past qualification to work within the early years and childcare sector in Wales.

The list is available to download at: ([www.ccwales.org.uk/qualifications](http://www.ccwales.org.uk/qualifications)).

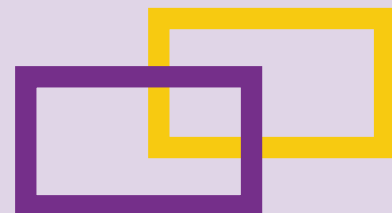
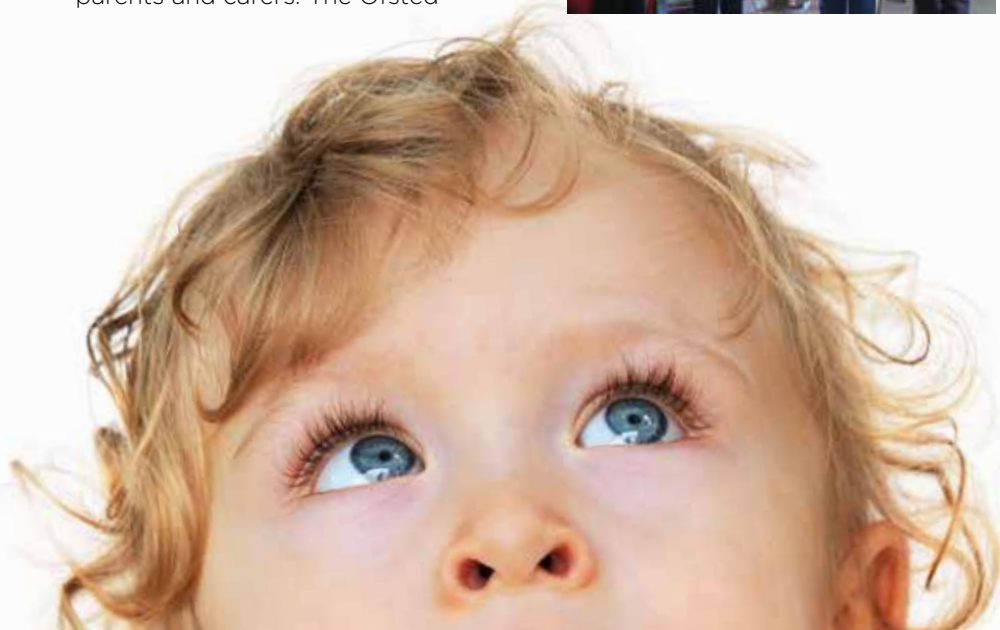
### Early Years & Childcare Induction Framework for Wales: Guidance for Managers

This recently launched resource has been developed to support managers during the induction period for new starters. This booklet provides guidance on using the Early Years and Childcare Induction Framework as well as providing ideas and prompts on how to assess against the outcomes contained in the framework. A progress log and a certification sheet have also been developed to support the induction process. Care Council for Wales are seeking feedback on the ease of use of these resources.

The guidance is available to download at: ([www.ccwales.org.uk/early-years-andchildcare-induction-framework](http://www.ccwales.org.uk/early-years-andchildcare-induction-framework)). ■

### SANDIE GRIEVE

Workforce Development Officer  
Care Council for Wales



# Current projects at Wales PPA

## Jane Alexander provides an update on developments at our association

Here at Wales PPA we have recently started two new projects that I'd like to share with you. The first is a pilot to promote to families the important role of play in their children's development from birth. This project involves supporting you as early years providers to help engage parents and carers of children in your care at an early stage. This means providing parents and carers with opportunities to broaden their understanding of the individual needs of their children.

Evidence suggests that parental involvement in early learning has a greater impact on children's wellbeing and achievement than any other factor, such as family income, parental education or school environment. So we will be promoting the benefits of a

positive home learning environment, which can also be supported by high quality early years childcare in preparation for children's eventual transition to school.

Our newly appointed engagement workers will be making contact with our members who run parent and toddler groups and playgroups, and other agencies, to work together to increase the promotion of learning through play to parents. We'll keep you posted on these developments as and when they occur.



“ A big thank you to those of you who have already participated in the business assessment tool and workforce surveys. ”

The second project is our work with the umbrella organisation, Cwlwm. Cwlwm is a partnership with four other childcare organisations in Wales: Mudiad Meithrin, Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs, PACEY and NDNA Cymru. Through this strategic partnership, Cwlwm aims to support you as childcare providers by identifying business support needs, such as registration support and training needs, and ways to deliver this. In addition, Cwlwm will be looking at sharing best practice across Wales in order to develop sustainable childcare and innovative solutions.

You will have already received information about Cwlwm and now

there is a Cwlwm Facebook page ([facebook.com/cwlwm](https://www.facebook.com/cwlwm)) and website ([www.cwlwm.org](http://www.cwlwm.org)) for you to visit.

A big thank you to those of you who have already participated in the business assessment tool and workforce surveys. We will use this information to develop future support and to liaise with Welsh Government on the needs of the sector. As the project progresses, we will update you and provide feedback on developments. ■

**JANE ALEXANDER**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Wales PPA





This quarter, I will provide you with an overview of upcoming changes within the Foundation Phase, all of which will potentially have a direct impact upon your practice. As children learn, develop and become successful within their education so should practitioners. It is the role of the practitioner to think creatively and provide innovative ways in which children can explore and experiment their learning environment.

It is vitally important to keep up to date with current changes to ensure you provide the best possible

learning experiences for children within your care. A good practitioner is often defined as a reflective practitioner: one who consistently strives to improve their practice and opportunities offered to children, allowing them to achieve their full potential. As early years practitioners you should already be familiar with the reflective process, ensuring you provide a continuing and enhanced provision. The use of reflective practice to analyse and evaluate your current provision will also help you to find new ways of implementing

upcoming changes successfully, benefiting children's learning as well as your own professional competence.

I have put together a timeline of changes within the Foundation Phase to provide you with a snapshot of what's to come, what this means for you as a practitioner as well as a reference point for further information. ■

**KELCIE HURLEY**

Early Years Project Co-ordinator  
Wales PPA

Changes within the Foundation Phase	Timescale	Overview
<p><b>Donaldson Report</b></p> <p>Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales.</p>	<p>Published: February 2015</p>	<p>Be sure to read the Donaldson report that aims to raise standards and radically change the way in which children throughout Wales learn.</p>
<p><b>Revision of the Areas of Learning (AoL)</b></p> <p>Language, Literacy and Communication Skills and Mathematical Development.</p>	<p>Statutory: September 2015</p>	<p>Key aims of the revised AoL:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support emergent and early literacy and numeracy skills.</li> <li>• Existing AoL become year-on-year expectation statements.</li> <li>• Alignment of AoL and LNF skills - merging into one document.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Foundation Phase Profile (FPP)</b></p> <p>One element of the Early Years Development and Assessment Framework (EYDAF).</p>	<p>Statutory: September 2015</p>	<p>Implement a national, consistently used assessment tool in order to track and support individual children's learning and development throughout the Foundation Phase.</p>

# Foundation Phase: Talking Point

Kelcie Hurley updates us on developments within the early years curriculum

## What this means for me as a practitioner

Recommended changes made throughout the review suggest a new way of thinking throughout practice with a clear and more coherent structured curriculum. As a practitioner you could possibly be implementing these changes.

## Where you can access the report:

[www.learning.wales.gov.uk](http://www.learning.wales.gov.uk)

## What this means for me as a practitioner

Leaders/practitioners will need to:

- Update existing planning.
- Ensure planning for skills and range reflect the revised AoL.
- Ensure progress for learners using a range of progressive 'next step' development.

## Where you can access the revised AoL:

All settings should have received a copy of the revised AoL; however, you can also access copies at: ([www.learning.wales.gov.uk](http://www.learning.wales.gov.uk)).

## What this means for me as a practitioner

Practitioners will need to become familiar with the Foundation Phase Profile and it will be seen as good practice to carry out baseline assessment using a 'compact' profile. The profile will assess children's abilities and development in **four** areas of learning:

- Personal and social development, wellbeing and cultural diversity.
- Language, literacy and communication skills.
- Mathematical development.
- Physical development.

## Where you can access information about the profile:

Visit: ([www.learning.wales.gov.uk](http://www.learning.wales.gov.uk)).  
You can also sign up to 'Dysg' on the Learning Wales website to receive regular updates about the Foundation Phase.



# All about schemas

## Deborah Fielden on the benefits of observing and identifying patterns of play behaviour in children

**P**icture this familiar scene during a busy ten minutes one morning at a pre-school setting: One child is standing at the water tray and spends two minutes pouring water onto the water wheel, watching closely as it spins around. She walks over to the box of train tracks and trains, quickly builds a track and pushes a train round it before running outside and spinning around on the grass until she becomes dizzy and falls over laughing. Another child is in the home corner. He collects every piece of role play food, puts them all into the washing machine and closes the door. Then he wanders outside, crawls into a den in the corner of the garden and sits quietly for a few moments. He then comes back inside to the painting area. He hurriedly makes a few marks on some paper with a brush and then spends a few more minutes covering the whole piece of paper (and his hands and arms) with paint.

What do these observations tell us about these two children? We may decide that they are 'flitters', unable to settle and concentrate on any activity for more than a couple of minutes. Or maybe that they are quickly exploring the resources and activities on offer within the environment that morning without any underlying plan or motivation. However, any early years practitioner with an understanding of schematic theory will quickly be able to identify that both children are displaying very strong schemas in their play. The practitioner will be able to use these observations effectively to plan for and support their future learning and development.

### What are schemas?

Put simply, schemas are "repetitive play patterns" (Stella Louis, 2008) that can be observed running through children's play. They are individual patterns of behaviour that absorb and fascinate children, motivating them to apply these learning styles to many different activities, resources and experiences during their day. Schemas provide a framework to their play and explorations.

Jean Piaget was the first major theorist to highlight the existence of young children's schemas and schematic learning. The subsequent research carried out by Chris Athey, Tina Bruce and Cathy Nutbrown during the 1970s and 80s developed his ideas - identifying and naming a range of different schemas - making them more understandable and accessible to early years practitioners. ▶▶







► There are many different schemas and the links in the resources section will give you plenty of information to support your practice; here are the characteristics of six of the most common schemas:

Schemas	Observable behaviours and signs
<b>Transporting</b>	Moving themselves or objects from one place to another, sometimes on wheeled toys or in buckets, buggies, boxes and bags.  Drawing or talking about journeys and travel.  A fascination with watching machines, eg diggers and dumpers moving objects and materials.
<b>Rotational</b>	An interest in things and objects that are circular and that turn and spin.  Mark-making that contains circles and spirals.  Enjoyment of being spun around and ring games.
<b>Trajectory</b>	An interest in how objects and people move in different directions – vertically, horizontally, through the air, etc.  A fascination with water pouring from taps, through funnels, etc.  Throwing things through the air and watching things fly.
<b>Positional</b>	An interest in lining things up and arranging things, sometimes in order according to size, colour, etc.  Enjoyment of sorting collections of objects and creating patterns with resources.  Being particular about how their food is presented or the order in which they eat different parts of their meal.
<b>Enclosing/ Enveloping</b>	An interest in filling and emptying containers and spaces.  Enjoyment of creating and hiding themselves and objects in enclosed spaces.  Covering or wrapping themselves or objects with materials and substances to “hide” what is inside.
<b>Transforming</b>	Exploring what happens when different substances are mixed together, eg adding more water to sand.  Enjoyment of activities that involve mixing, eg cooking, making playdough.  Mixing up their meals into a mess!

So, in the examples given, we can identify that the first child has a very strong rotational schema, whereas the second has a dominant enveloping/ enclosing schema. Children may abandon a schema after a while and move on to a different one, may revisit an original schema at a later stage in their development or may start to combine different schemas into clusters. Regular observations are key to keeping track of each child’s current preoccupations and interests.

## Why should we use our knowledge of schemas in our work with babies and children?

Knowledge of individual schemas provides a very effective observational tool and way of interpreting and understanding children’s behaviour. In order to provide a high quality environment that promotes every child’s learning and development, we need to really tune in to the individual interests and learning styles

of each child and to discover what motivates and engages them and drives their play. If we can identify a child’s dominant schema then we can harness that current passion and motivation to plan and support some powerful learning opportunities, creating individualised and inclusive provision. As the Welsh Foundation

Phase guidance document *Learning and Teaching Pedagogy* (2008) states: “When motivating children to learn, it is of paramount importance to ensure that the curriculum responds to their needs and interests and builds on prior experiences.” ►



### Resources

Louis, S (2013). *Schemas and the characteristics of effective learning*. London: BAECE

Louis, S, Beswick, C, Magraw, L & Hayes, L. Featherstone, S. (Ed) (2013). *Understanding schemas in young children: Again! Again!* London: Featherstone Education

*Learning and Teaching Pedagogy* Welsh Government (2008) <http://bit.ly/LearnAndTeach>


### Useful links:

<http://bit.ly/schemasinaction>

### Contacting Deborah Fielden

Email: [deborah@thefieldens.com](mailto:deborah@thefieldens.com)

### Follow her on Twitter:

 @DeborahFielden

## How should we use our knowledge of schemas to support children's learning – what is the adult role?

There are three main parts to the adult role:

- **Observe and listen to individual children** to identify their current schema(s). Once we have a good knowledge of different schemas, we can use this to interpret and evaluate a child's play and actions, sharing our knowledge with colleagues.
- **Plan and provide a range of activities, resources and experiences** that tune in to these schemas and are therefore likely to motivate and engage the child in their learning effectively. We can incorporate a child's schema into many different activities that promote learning and development across all seven areas of learning in the Welsh Foundation Phase curriculum. So, for example, the child with a rotational schema might enjoy cooking activities that involve stirring, whisking and mixing or exploring a collection of clocks, cogs, locks and keys. The child with an enveloping/enclosing schema may be drawn to the mark-making area if envelopes of different sizes

and a post box are added to the resources or might enjoy an activity involving burying and digging for treasure. Knowledge of schemas is particularly useful when planning for a child who appears "stuck" at one activity; once their schema has been identified, they can then be enticed to other activities and resources that incorporate that schema.

- **Support and interact with the child as they play**, extending their thinking and learning in different directions through conversation and sustained shared thinking. A skilful practitioner will be able to identify and make effective use of the many opportunities for learning contained within a single activity, ensuring that every child accesses a balanced curriculum whatever their schema. A child is far more likely to persevere and concentrate at an activity if it appeals to their intrinsic interests and preoccupations. We need to interact sensitively to nurture those essential learning skills and processes.

It is also a good idea to share schema information with parents and carers, encouraging them to become "schema spotters" at home and to contribute their observations to their child's ongoing learning journeys and records. We can all think of schematic behaviours that can prove irritating and inconvenient at times – maybe an endless fascination with turning knobs and dials or a liking for posting objects into the DVD player – and being able to explain such behaviours through schemas and suggest activities and resources that tap into these fascinations can be helpful. Leaflets, displays and workshops are all easy ways of providing information and getting parents on board. ■

### DEBORAH FIELDEN

Freelance Early Years Consultant



# Quality for All (QfA): the assessment

Get a unique insight into how our quality assurance scheme operates from an assessor's point of view

The email arrives. A QfA assessing opportunity is available somewhere in Wales. All QfA assessors are invited to apply for the work and consider whether they can meet the tight timescale: as the setting has put in so much work, we try to get the process completed as soon as possible.

Once allocated to an assessor, the provider's evaluation is emailed to them. Assessors look at all the paperwork the setting has submitted and highlight areas that they would like to 'test' at the visit. An action plan is drawn up and sent to the provider so that both parties are clear about what will happen at the assessment visit.

On the day the assessment begins immediately – how am I welcomed, what security measures are in place, do I sign in and is my pass checked? How am I introduced to the children, other members of staff and parents/carers? I make as many notes as possible, keeping aware of my surroundings and what is going on during the session.

I listen and speak to the children, staff and parents/carers and record any quotes that I may use later in my report.

During the visit I observe staff interactions with the children, and each other, and see all areas of the provision, both indoors and out. I talk to the manager about how they observe and plan for the children and their future plans for the setting. We may talk about governance and also the financial stability of the organisation. I ask staff about safeguarding procedures and how

they develop, share and receive new policies. I view other paperwork that I have requested to be available in the action plan. An assessment visit usually takes approximately two to three hours.

After the visit, I prepare my report as soon as possible. This ensures that, in addition to my notes, I have my experience fresh in my mind. I try to be as specific as possible and avoid general comments in my report. After pulling together all the evidence, both before and after my visit, I consider and give a QfA grade for the setting. This report is then sent to the QfA co-ordinator for proofreading and moderation and return (by email) to the setting. The provider is also asked for feedback on the assessor's visit.

I'm one of a group of assessors; we meet regularly and look at several anonymous reports to ensure we are all interpreting the evidence the same way and agreeing on an appropriate grade. This makes assessors more confident in our decisions and also means that the providers can be sure that all assessors are making quality judgements at the same level. During these training workshops we also discuss any queries that may have occurred and consider if we can improve things for the future.

## Interested in becoming an assessor?

For further details and ways to apply visit [www.walesppa.org/jobs](http://www.walesppa.org/jobs)

Just like your setting, we are always looking to progress, set future plans and improve the quality of the award and, ultimately, the experiences for the children. I hope you will work towards your QfA award and see the benefits of continuing assessment at this higher level. Children deserve more than 'National Minimum Standards'.

For further details on the QfA scheme and ways to apply, please see the ad on the back cover. ■

**KAREN PEREIRA,**  
QfA Assessor  
Wales PPA





# Skogsmulle is coming to Wales



**Discover how a forest creature is helping children over the world learn through play outdoors**



Skogsmulle, pronounced *skogs-mull-a* and translates as 'forest creature', is the central figure in a concept that facilitates children's learning through firsthand sensory experiences in the outdoors. The concept supports children's development during their period of mastery through fantasy play. Skogsmulle, along with nature, acts as a third teacher helping develop children's understanding of the world.

The concept was created in Sweden by Gösta Frohm in the 1950s and today one in every four children there experience the magic of learning with Skogsmulle. Skogsmulle and his friends are stewards of nature and through their stories, fairy tales, songs and lessons they provide an inspirational, holistic and child-centered approach to achieving the early years curriculum.

Being in the outdoors or *friluft*, which translates as 'outdoor life', is part of the Scandinavian culture. Friluft permeates all aspects of life, including children's education. In Sweden there are outdoor nursery schools called *I Ur och Skur* or 'Rain or Shine' that embed the Skogsmulle

approach into their formal curriculum, and with this their children thrive. They not only achieve academically later on in life but they also are among the happiest and healthiest children on our planet. Looking to Scandinavia we see best practice for creating balance between high achievement and wellbeing; something we all want as parents and teachers.

## Focus on Wales

In 2011, I, Darren Lewis, founder of the social enterprise Cyfleon, became the first leader in Wales to become trained in the Skogsmulle pedagogy at the inaugural International Leaders course held in Stockholm (for further details visit Juliet Robertson's blog ([www.creativestartlearning.co.uk/international/skogsmulle-learning-for-all-the-senses](http://www.creativestartlearning.co.uk/international/skogsmulle-learning-for-all-the-senses))).

Seeing the potential of this pedagogy to enrich the Welsh Foundation Phase and wider early years practice throughout the UK, Cyfleon worked with early years consultants Juliet Robertson and Rose Joyce to create a blueprint for bringing the concept into the UK. The Skogsmulle UK concept identifies and embraces the unique cultural







Boys engaged in Skogsmulle lesson developing literacy and numeracy skills in the woods.

difference between the countries of the UK. In Wales, characters are bilingual and with Welsh identities; utilising our strong heritage of storytelling, myth, legends and our own language.

Being a Skogsmulle leader is being part of an international community of early years best practice. All leaders attending the International Skogsmulle Symposia (held annually in various countries) renew their commitment to the guiding principles and philosophy of Skogsmulle, including supporting the UNCRC and sustainable development goals. For further details visit ([www.friluftframjandet.se/skogsmullestiftelsen/32](http://www.friluftframjandet.se/skogsmullestiftelsen/32)).

The next International Symposia will be in Wales in 2017 and held at Dare Valley Country Park in Aberdare. The event will be bringing best practice in early years pedagogy from across the globe including Scandinavia, Germany and the far east into the Welsh valleys. Will you be there?

For further information on Skogsmulle please email ([info@cyfleon.co.uk](mailto:info@cyfleon.co.uk)). ■

**DARREN LEWIS**

Director of Education and Learning  
Cyfleon



*Picture Above:* This wooden structure in the woods is the outdoor class room for this pre-school or kindergarten. Children spend as much as 80 per cent of their learning during the early years in the outdoors. Plenty of opportunity for firsthand experiences.







# Do they have a choice?

Dr Pete King and Dr Justine Howard from Swansea University explain the importance of choice in play

**A**s early years professionals, we are all aware that play makes an important contribution to developing children's language skills, cognitive development, mental health, and more. Indeed, recent research (see: references), focusing on finding out what characteristics children associate with play, highlights that having choice is an important feature.

Being given choice in an activity can make a difference as to whether or not a child sees an activity as play. And when children see an activity as play they demonstrate more sophisticated problem solving skills, are less distracted and show increased signs of emotional wellbeing.

## The play space in your pre-school setting

What do the play spaces in your pre-school setting look like? Do children have to play in specific areas (for example, is there a home corner or

a construction area?). Can children manipulate the play space so they have enough space to play or have space that is specifically right for their type of play?

Children need to be able to choose the amount of space they need and the space may have to be specific for the type of play they want to engage in. For example, this space could be very small, such as making a den underneath a table, or could be larger for playing a game of tag. The space they need could result in moving furniture.

How do you respond when children are moving the furniture? Do you allow this or are there strict rules on how the play environment is set up? Sometimes a compromise may be needed, either from the pre-school staff or from the child, but that is the important aspect of learning to make choices. If the play space is too rigid, ie cannot be moved or changed, this can reduce the amount of choice children will perceive they have when they play.





## The resources available in the pre-school setting

What kinds of materials are available for your children to play in the pre-school setting? Are the resources already pre-determined before children arrive? Are the resources in easy reach of the children or do they have to ask the pre-school staff for them? Can children manipulate and change the resources or are they fixed and unchangeable? The resources children can use may have a limited range of use.

The best resources are the ones that offer more flexibility and choice in their use. The old adage that children find more joy from the boxes their Christmas presents arrive in than the presents themselves is often true. When using cardboard boxes children can engage in many different types of play, whether making something or using the props in a fantasy game. The more props or 'loose parts' (as defined in *How not to cheat children: The theory of loose parts*) children can manipulate, the more choice children can have in how they want to play. The cardboard box as a loose part will offer more choice than items with limited function.

When children are painting and decide to use their hands rather than paint brushes, do you support this sudden change in choice or are children told to stop so not to make a mess? Sometimes, as pre-school staff, we set up activities to meet an adult defined goal (painting a specific picture, for example); however, the child may choose to do a hand print instead. The reason for the child's choice may not be apparent, but, if feasible, you should support their choice on how they want to paint (it could be a simple reason that they never get the chance to do it at home). Hand and finger painting also provide chances for children to experience textures.

## Other people in the pre-school setting

How do children play with other people in your pre-school setting? How are you involved in their activities? This is the biggest factor that influences children's choice in their play.

Children's perception of choice is reduced when they feel they are being told what to do or if other people are taking over their play. However, when children feel supported or other people provide more variety when playing with other people, children perceive more choice in their play. This can be demonstrated simply on the wording we use when giving children instructions.

When asking children what they want to play with and where they would like to play, children perceive this as more supportive. When instructing children that only certain resources are available and telling children where they are allowed to play in specific designated areas, children perceive less choice. Involving children in deciding how each play session is set up, and providing access to all play resources to choose from, will increase their perception of choice when they play.

The more choice children have, the more playful they will perceive the pre-school environment. This will increase if the pre-school staff have a playful manner with the children, being a play partner in their play: A play partner supports children's choices, rather than directing what children should do, of course this is and can be a time-consuming (yet rewarding) role.

## Some thoughts

Working in a pre-school environment involves more than just supporting children's play. The other roles pre-school staff have to adopt (organising, managing, talking to parents, etc) often means quality time playing with the children is difficult to find. In addition, there are health and safety constraints as well as meeting targets within the Foundation Phase.

Research has found the more playful adults are, the more children feel they have more control in their play, and this includes making their own choices. By supporting children in making their own choices you are also supporting them in developing the skill of decision-making. The more flexible the play environment and the more resources children can play with (what is often termed 'loose parts') for children to make their own choices can have a positive developmental effect.

## Next time you are in your pre-school setting:

- Think how the play space is being used by the children and how much choice they have in setting it up, moving it and negotiating what space they need.
- Think who decides on what resources are available and how much choice do the resources afford to the children.
- Think about who children negotiate space and resources with (both the pre-school staff and other children).

If you'd like to learn more about facilitating playful environments and the benefits associated with this, the following book is a useful resource:

Howard, J. & McInnes, K. (2013). *The Essence of Play: A Practice Companion for Professionals Working with Children and Young People*. London: Routledge. ■

**DR PETE KING AND  
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# Promoting emotional wellbeing

**We hear from Newport healthy schools advisory teacher, Alison Marchant and early years consultant, Heather Morgan, on the Seal initiative**



Over 25 pre-school settings are currently engaged in the Newport Healthy and Sustainable Pre-School Scheme. They have been working through a variety of health topics including nutrition and oral health as well as active play. The aim of the scheme is to ensure that children experience a healthy and safe environment when at their early years setting.

Recently, the settings have been working towards the emotional and mental health phase and attended training around Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning, also known as Seal.

Seal is an initiative which helps to promote social and emotional literacy in children and equips them with the skills they need to lead a healthy, happy life.





In their early years, children learn by observing their families, their interactions at home and with people in the outside world.



**Seal supports children by learning skills to develop:**

- 1. Social awareness.**
- 2. Appropriate management of their feelings.**
- 3. Motivation.**
- 4. Empathy.**
- 5. Social interactions and relationships.**

During the training, practitioners learned that the Seal initiative helps children become successful learners, responsible citizens, and confident individuals. To be effective, Seal needs to be embedded in the life of the setting, permeating every interaction between adults and children.

One of the biggest influences in developing children's attitudes and responses are their parents and carers. In their early years, children learn by observing their families, their interactions at home and with people in the outside world. These core lessons, instilled early on, become part of a child's unique personality and can overrule everything they are taught later in life. Children also develop their emotional wellbeing through early interactions with siblings and peers. Through trial and error they discover how to achieve the desired results, which might be expressing their feelings or defining personal boundaries, without severing their connection to the people involved.

Supporting children's wellbeing presents practitioners with so many unique variables. Each individual's temperament, perceptions and 'baggage' present different challenges. By taking part in the workshops practitioners realised that unless they manage their own feelings appropriately, their own negativity can have an adverse effect on

children's wellbeing. Adults need to ensure their interactions with others are positive and they are good role models for the children to emulate. Children need to see examples of adults using appropriate experiences to develop the skills to support their own emotional wellbeing. Practitioners learned that by exposing children to everyday social situations through stories, children will begin to learn to manage and resolve their conflicts and strong emotions.

In early years settings, practitioners need to give children positive experiences of situations that deal with a wide range of feelings, to help children to develop skills to deal appropriately with their strong emotions. During the workshops, practitioners learned that they need to show children everyone has the same feelings; however, it is only appropriate to behave in a certain way if their actions do not hurt or upset others. Through using a timely story from the training manual of Personal Social and Emotional Development (PSED) stories given to each setting, practitioners empower children with the skills to resolve conflicts. During the final part of the practical workshops, practitioners worked in small groups to create their own stories using puppets in their own settings.

The feedback from the training was very positive, with many attendees

commenting that they had gained confidence and a wide range of practical skills to use in their settings for children to develop improved levels of emotional wellbeing.

If anyone would like further information or wishes to book training on using puppet stories to support emotional wellbeing, they can email me at ([mogtheteacher@aol.com](mailto:mogtheteacher@aol.com)). ■

**FOREWORD BY ALISON MARCHANT**  
Newport Healthy Schools Advisory Teacher

**HEATHER MORGAN**  
Early Years/Foundation Phase Consultant & Training Adviser





# Cosy comp

## You could win a set of Hanging Number Cookies!

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name, address and contact telephone number to [info@walesppa.org](mailto:info@walesppa.org) - or complete the form below and post it to Wales PPA's head office (address on page 3, photocopies are accepted).

Alternatively, send the same details in a private message via our Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/walesppa](http://www.facebook.com/walesppa)).

Four entries chosen at random will each receive a set of Hanging Number Cookies. All entries must be received by 13th July 2015. ■

**Good luck!**

Name.....

.....

Address.....

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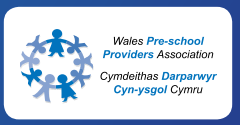
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0300 123 7777

#### Gov.uk (replaces Directgov)

[www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

#### WCVA

[www.wcva.org.uk](http://www.wcva.org.uk)

0800 0 197 391

#### Department of Work and Pensions

[www.dwp.gov.uk](http://www.dwp.gov.uk)

#### Care Council for Wales

[www.ccwales.org.uk](http://www.ccwales.org.uk)

0300 30 33 444

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[www.ico.gov.uk](http://www.ico.gov.uk)

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