

Fair Play: A consultation on the play strategy. A commitment in The Children's Plan

Consultation Response Form

The closing date for this consultation is: 18 July
2008

Your comments must reach us by that date.

department for
children, schools and families

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Please tick if you want us to keep your response confidential.

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If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can contact Alison Venner Jones on:

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If you have a query relating to the consultation process you can contact the Consultation Unit on:

Telephone: 01928 794888

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Please mark an X in the box below that best describes you as a respondent.

<input type="checkbox"/> Local Authority	<input type="checkbox"/> Charity	<input type="checkbox"/> Young Person
<input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer working with Children	<input type="checkbox"/> National / Commercial Organisation	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent
<input type="checkbox"/> Professional working with children	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Professional Association	<input type="checkbox"/> Health Authority
<input type="checkbox"/> School	<input type="checkbox"/> Play Organisation	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please Specify)

Please Specify:

TACTYC (*Training, Advancement and Co-operation in Teaching Young Children*) was founded in 1978, initially to support tutors of advanced courses for teachers of young children. Members are drawn from academic, advisory and training organisations and include early years practitioners in all sectors. TACTYC represents 350+ very highly qualified and experienced educators, with particular expertise in the early years.

The organisation's aims are:

- To promote the highest quality professional development for all practitioners in early childhood education and care;
- To pursue matters of current educational concern and to act as a voice for all those who work with young children;
- To facilitate effective communication and support for early years tutors, trainers, advisers and practitioners in schools and settings;
- To further the educational well-being of all young children.

There is an international dimension to TACTYC's reach, partly through *Early Years, An International Journal of Research and Development*, published three times a year by Taylor and Francis/Routledge, and also through our website: www.tactyc.org.uk

1 Is this the right national vision and set of aims for play in England?

Yes, plus further suggestions

No

Not Sure

Comments:

TACTYC endorses the importance of ensuring that all children have access to secure, challenging and creative opportunities for child-directed play. We have specific points to make about play in educational environments, with a particular focus on young children's learning.

As the Early Years Foundation Stage makes clear, children learn through play, which gives them opportunities to explore, experiment, try new things and to combine activities in different ways. Through play, children rehearse, consolidate and extend their thinking and show initiative, as well as coming to terms with social and emotional issues in their lives and refining their physical skills. Play allows them to test things out and to make mistakes without fear of failure, while giving them the intrinsic satisfaction of achieving their own purposes at their own pace.

2 Are the areas we have identified for action right? What other areas could be considered and what more could we do?

Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

The definition of play in paragraph 1.2 overlaps with definitions of child-initiated learning, where children can follow their own ideas and interests in their own way and for their own reasons. In the early years, this gives an insight into what children already know as well as into their current preoccupations, and is therefore a vital starting point for planning a curriculum to suit different groups of children.

The focus of this initiative is outdoor play: this is an equal opportunities issue for early years settings and schools which do not have access to an outdoor area, so that young children are not able to move flexibly between indoors and out. Regulations should require all provision for young children to have accessible outdoor space within a specified time frame. Having supervised visits to a playground does not compare with ready and flexible access to a playground or garden, where children can choose to be indoors or out as individuals and in small groups. This is particularly important in urban areas where young children are not able to play freely out of doors.

3 Who is responsible for helping children to play, and what are they responsible for?

Comments:

In addition to the playwork dimension which this consultation addresses, staff working with young children in the voluntary, independent and private sector as well as the maintained sector have a responsibility to support children's play. They have a role in designing, setting up and maintaining a suitable environment, and planning for ways to extend children's learning through play, based on their observations of what children choose to do. They have particular responsibilities in relation to children with special educational needs.

Staff working in the EYFS are also responsible for observing children at play so that they can follow up with suitable activities that will help to broaden and deepen children's understanding across all areas of learning. Ideally, they should share their observations with parents in order to achieve enriched and refined understandings of what the children are learning on both sides.

4 How can schools best support play, both for their pupils and for their local communities?

Comments:

This consultation specifies outdoor play; the prime way schools can support play and learning in the early years is by establishing accessible and designated early years outdoor spaces with direct access from all EYFS classrooms, and ideally for older classes too. The space should be designed and resourced to stimulate all areas of learning (in addition to children's physical development) so that their personal and social growth, communication, language and literacy, problem solving, reasoning and numeracy, knowledge and understanding of the world and creative development can take place and be challenged and extended through direct experience. Indoor and outdoor play should be a seamless experience for young children in educational settings.

It is crucial that play should be accepted as a legitimate approach to children's learning through the pedagogy of early childhood education, which is now statutory through the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Although the word 'play' is used in early years documents and policies, it is neither clearly defined, nor well understood by practitioners or policy makers. The word is used loosely to mean anything that is undertaken playfully, be that self-chosen activities by the child or playful teaching by the adults. Often, it implies playing about, in the sense of messing around. The phrase "learning through planned purposeful play" in the EYFS is perhaps designed to allay adult fears that young children are not working hard enough. It risks confusing the plans and purposes of adults relating to their goals for children's achievements with the authentic, but

different, intentions of playful children.

Young children's ability to learn is embedded in play, which is the most powerful medium for learning in the early years. Research shows that play is more than a teaching tool: it is a deep and extremely meaningful activity for children, closely linked to their self-regulated learning and metacognition, and vital to the development of appropriate self-knowledge and dispositions towards learning. Play and learning are intrinsically linked to the young child's sense of self, their identity and their efficacy as independent learners. Effective provision for play is thus equally important indoors for children in Key Stages 1 and 2 as well as in the EYFS.

A recent research seminar held by TACTYC underlines the following key findings:

Children as playful learners

Play and emotional and cognitive development are interconnected. Children engaged in play situations show greater evidence of problem-solving abilities and creativity. Children engaged in playful tasks they have initiated show higher levels of cognitive self-regulation. (Dr. David Whitebread, Senior Lecturer in Psychology and Education, University of Cambridge).

Children respond positively and quickly when adults convey the acceptance of playful learning in the classroom. Children for whom play is a regular and fulfilling occurrence in the classroom complete teacher-directed tasks more quickly. (Justine Howard, Centre for Child Research, School of Human Science, Swansea University).

Social free play is an evolved behaviour, and is important for complex, autonomous social behaviour leading to self-knowledge and social competence in all primate species; rough and tumble play experience is essential for all juvenile primates, including human children, to independently learn the necessary skills to fully engage in the complex social relationships underlying the relevant adult society. (Dr. Pam Jarvis, Bradford University).

Play can promote conflict resolution skills in young children; highly social and cooperative play in classrooms has clear links with learning, progression and identity. (Professor Pat Broadhead, Leeds Metropolitan University).

Risky play is difficult to theorise but essential for well-being; children need opportunities to push themselves beyond boundaries in familiar environments; schools and classrooms have become risk averse places and this is detrimental to children's development and well-being. (Helen Tovey, Principal Lecturer, Early Childhood Studies, Roehampton University).

Children have many ways of making meaning (multi-modality) and this is facilitated through imaginative play; there are clear links between playful meaning making and the meanings made as they use marks for early writing and for early written mathematics. (Maulfry Worthington, Doctoral Researcher, Free University, Amsterdam).

Children's role play is naturally influenced by the media; this is their culture and should be respected and understood; there are no polar opposites between their on-line and off-line worlds; motivation for reading/writing is high in virtual worlds as is social networking. (Professor Jackie Marsh, Sheffield University).

Adults as playful pedagogues.

This aspect is only gradually being defined as practitioners have problems defining their role, assessing learning through play and understanding how and when to intervene. Play is operating to an outcomes-led agenda and this is contrary to the true nature of play. (Professor Liz Wood, Exeter University)

Understanding children's play as a work in progress is complex for educators as they tend to watch it only partially; educators need help in understanding the ways in which different areas of play provision can contribute to children's learning. (Professor Pat Broadhead, Leeds Metropolitan University)

Practitioners do not tend to like it when children take risks, they see danger rather than competence and subversion rather than confidence; children who lack access to challenging, adventurous play can become risk averse or reckless and do not develop the skills to be safe. (Helen Tovey, Principal Lecturer, Roehampton University).

Knowledgeable adults can interpret the complex, inner meanings of children's play and this understanding can be developed. (Maulfry Worthington, Doctoral Researcher, Free University, Amsterdam).

Educators need a deeper understanding of children's computer use in the home; it is becoming very sophisticated at an early age for some children. (Professor Jackie Marsh, Sheffield University)

When teachers understand play, its provision and potential, then children respond with multi-narratives and powerful home-school links; teachers can respect and engage with the uncertainty of play in relation to its inherent learning potential. (Kathy Gouch, Senior Lecturer in Education, Canterbury Christ Church University).

Links with home and the wider community

There are implications for work with parents and the wider community, as there should be continuity and challenge in children's play lives across home, preschool, school and community contexts.

Initial teacher education and continuing professional development

The complexity of this work is not currently reflected in most initial training or continuing professional development of specialist early years teachers or other staff involved in the early years of education. They, as much as playworkers, need to gain professional confidence and competence so that they can build on children's ideas and interests, developing a play-based pedagogy. Teachers and all practitioners need access to training which offers:

- A sufficiently explicit language and set of shared understandings about what playful learning is in educational settings;
- Extensive support in observing and learning from play observations through joint activity and reflection;
- An understanding the rich cultural heritages that children bring and that become manifest in play, leading to learning
- Respect for children, allowing for and understanding bio-cultural development, reflected in curriculum and pedagogies;
- Support for practitioners to develop their understanding of the links between cooperative play and intellectual development and of children's capacity to develop conflict resolution strategies during social and cooperative play;
- A climate of trust in children and their capacities to take the lead
- An opportunity for practitioners who have implemented and maintained playful learning pedagogies to share their practice and understandings with others
- Explicit support to illustrate how play can lead the curriculum in educational settings and confidence that professionals as well as children learn from playful learning provision. Play in educational settings generates creative thinking both for children and adults.

5 What more could be done and in what settings to support disabled children to be able to play?

Comments:

Home based support should be available for disabled children from birth, and should include playful approaches to development. Play enables children who are different from the norm to create their own ways of participating in and being accepted within the culture of their community and setting.

All early years settings and schools should be inclusive, and ensure that disabled children have access to as wide a range of play experiences as possible. Support from educational psychologists, health professionals, occupational therapists and organisations such as Portage can enhance children's opportunities to participate. As far as possible, parents should be included in the planning and evaluations so that they can reinforce and develop relevant aspects at home.

6 Are there groups of children who do not have opportunities to play and what could be done to help them?

Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

Young children in group settings with no access to outdoors are severely disadvantaged, especially if they live in an environment where they have restricted opportunities for active movement and play. All registered early years settings should be required to have an outside space.

Play has been lost from many reception, Y1 and Y2 classes and needs to be reinstated as a legitimate activity, so that teachers can build progression in play into their curriculum and provision. This should be extended into Key Stage 2 so that children become master players.

Some children have little opportunity to play outside school for cultural or religious reasons, which means they are not free of adult control and management of their activities. Their situation needs further thought in the context of this consultation. It is essential that their parents and communities understand the reasons why play is promoted in school settings.

7 What do parents and children see to be the biggest gap in the play facilities that are currently available to them?

Comments:

This question has been explored in several policy documents on play: lack of safe spaces indoors and outdoors, lack of available adults who will be on hand to interact and support children on their own terms and lack of progressive challenge in play provision are a concern for many adults. Children appreciate wild spaces or waste ground where they are free to make their own choices of what they want to do.

8 What can we do to make play spaces more appealing – particularly for children aged 8-13?

Comments:

Involve children in policy development and in decisions about how the spaces should look and develop.

Understand contemporary play choices and cultures in relation to difference and diversity.

9 How can communities be best involved in the design and running of new play spaces?

Comments:

There is insufficient knowledge and understanding of play patterns and choices in relation to diverse cultures and communities. Current policy documents make universal claims about the value of play without detailed underpinning knowledge of home-based practices; orientations to play; cultural constraints on play; problems with access and supervision, and the impact of poverty and social disadvantage on children's play.

Children should be involved in making decisions about the design and running of play spaces, and should be helped to see what might be possible if their experience is limited. Their opinions should be taken seriously.

10 What needs to change for parents and children to be less concerned about outside play?

Comments:

In the early years, children generally choose to play outside, and have few concerns. Many parents and staff understand the need for risky play, but nevertheless need to be assured that reasonable care is taken of children. There are also instances when adults prefer to stay inside in wet, cold or windy conditions, and some think that children should not be out of doors in inclement weather. A lead should be taken from the Scandinavian countries, where the benefits of access to outdoor play are widely recognised, and where adults participate actively in children's experience.

Agreement on acceptable parameters can only be achieved through discussion and debate, drawing on accurate statistical information about levels of risk. A consensus within each community is needed – and once achieved, can go a long way to protect play spaces from dangers caused through vandalism.

11 Where, when, and by whom should play be supervised, and where should it be unsupervised?

Comments:

In the early years, supervision by parents, and by staff in group settings, is essential. This does not mean that children should be in view all the time, but does require continuing awareness of their movements, and careful planning and regular maintenance of equipment.

In educational settings, more sophisticated supervision is needed. Adults should take care not to interfere too soon, but to observe and respect children's purposes in their play. The insights gained from observation can be used to fine tune and develop provision in ways that respond to children's ideas and interests.

As they get older, children should be expected to take increasing responsibility for supervising their own play spaces.

12 What further improvements to road safety and accessibility do parents and children want in order to support children's play?

Comments:

13 How can government and local communities support play through changing negative perceptions of children and young people?

Comments:

Opportunities should be taken to show what children are capable of when they are trusted to make their own decisions in their play.

14 Are worries about being sued leading to play areas that are dull and unstimulating?

Comments:

If designated play areas are stripped of all interest and challenge, children will go elsewhere to play.

15 What needs to happen in order for the work we're suggesting on planning to make a difference on the ground?

Comments:

A time frame should be set for when all early years settings should have direct access to outdoor provision.

Initial teacher education and all other training related to the EYFS, including continuing professional development, should enable staff to develop their understanding of the value of children's play in educational settings and their ability to explain this to parents and policy makers.

Examples of settings where children have rich play experience should be celebrated and disseminated. Video or film is an effective way of doing this, with voiceover to explain the complexity of what children are learning through their play and exploration.

16 What contribution should parents and communities make to support children playing outside?

Comments:

Parents and communities should appreciate and support the learning that children achieve through play outside as well as indoors. Parenting classes should focus on developing play skills and playful dispositions to learning. More research should be carried out on the use of public play spaces and provision (including museums and libraries) in order to develop more informed understanding of patterns of usage in relation to diversity and difference.

Most parents would agree with the government's aim to achieve consistency and continuity between the different aspects of children's lives at home, at school and in the community.

17 How can we ensure that play is given a high priority by local areas?

Comments:

Through funding and clear targets for developing high quality play provision. Local Play Forums could be set up to include multi-professional representation (linking to the ECM agenda) to review play provision, provide strategic guidance and monitor best practice in provision and usage. Membership of local forums should include representatives from the maintained, voluntary and private sectors, as well as representatives from business and industry.

Play must be recognised as an essential part of development: if not, children become aware that adults do not value what they choose to do unless it has been validated by adult involvement. This undermines their growing self-confidence and independence as well as their creativity,

18 What is the specific role of PCTs and primary care professionals in promoting healthy, active play?

Comments:

19 What role should playworkers take in delivering this agenda?

Comments:

There should be opportunities for playworkers to develop links with the Early Years and school communities in order to ensure continuity of provision, experience and challenge in play in contrasting contexts.

20 Please use this space for any other comments.

Comments:

Play has a crucial role in educational settings, particularly but not exclusively in the early years, which goes beyond the way this consultation is conceptualised. However, the aim to achieve continuity between home, school and community, means that the pedagogy of play should be considered alongside informal opportunities for play. This does not mean cheating children by taking over their ideas and initiatives, but respecting their intentions and building on what they already know and can do, which is the foundation for later learning.

This significant aspect of play has not been included in the thinking expressed through the consultation. The acknowledged benefits of outdoor play also apply to children indoors in nurseries and classrooms. We hope that the role of play in young children's learning will no longer be undermined by contradictory messages within the EYFS which are leading to top down pressures, particularly in relation to early literacy. Much can be achieved in the context of children's genuine interests and purposes, expressed through play, which furthermore enhances positive dispositions to learning, such as perseverance, concentration, memorisation, problem-setting and problem-solving skills. These dispositions impact on all areas of learning and development, including subject-based learning such as literacy and mathematics.

TACTYC, in association with expert colleagues including the chair of the British Educational Research Association Early Years Special Interest Group, is preparing a paper on play in educational settings, drawing on recent research which we would be happy to make available shortly.

21 Please let us have your views on responding to this consultation (e.g. the number and type of questions, was it easy to find, understand and complete etc).

Comments:

This focus on play is very welcome, as is the opportunity to contribute to the consultation, which is accessible and well organised. The answer to this final question will depend in large part on the extent to which responses influence policy development – as indicated above we believe that a significant aspect of play has been bypassed in the consultation, but must be taken into account in developing policy in order to meet the aspiration that there should be coherence in children’s experience of play in different contexts.

Thank you for taking the time to let us have your views. We do not intend to acknowledge individual responses unless you place an 'X' in the box below.

Please acknowledge this reply x

E-Mail address for acknowledgement mwendyscott@bopenworld.com

Here at the Department for Children, Schools and Families we carry out our research on many different topics and consultations. As your views are valuable to us, would it be all right if we were to contact you again from time to time either for research or to send through consultation documents?

xYes

No

All UK national public consultations are required to conform to the following standards:

1. Consult widely throughout the process, allowing a minimum of 12 weeks for written consultation at least once during the development of the policy.
2. Be clear about what your proposals are, who may be affected, what questions are being asked and the timescale for responses.
3. Ensure that your consultation is clear, concise and widely accessible.
4. Give feedback regarding the responses received and how the consultation process influenced the policy.

5. Monitor your department's effectiveness at consultation, including through the use of a designated consultation co-ordinator.

6. Ensure your consultation follows better regulation best practice, including carrying out a Regulatory Impact Assessment if appropriate.

Further information on the Code of Practice can be accessed through the Cabinet Office Website: <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/regulation/consultation-guidance/content/introduction/index.asp>

Thank you for taking time to respond to this consultation.

Completed questionnaires and other responses should be sent to the address shown below by 18 July 2008

Send by post to:

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