



THE UNIVERSITY  
of EDINBURGH



# The Play Cafe Project

Briefing

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## Overview

The briefing draws on our **research, community-based and co-design** work with more than **400** participants, as part of the **Play Cafe Project: what would Froebelian play cafes look like?**<sup>1</sup> funded by the Froebel Trust and the University of Edinburgh (project end date January 2025). As part of The Play Cafe research project activities we are working closely with 40 families in Scotland and Greece through ethnographic and participatory processes to: 1) understand the current opportunities that children have to **play** in community and business play spaces, and their underlying philosophies and principles, 2) explore children's, families', practitioners' and business owners/staff views of play cafes and co-design what play cafes may look like from children's and their families/communities' perspectives from a range of backgrounds and life histories/stories. The briefing aims to share some **emerging critical insights and key messages about young children, play and public life based on their lives and perspectives from different geographical locales**. The briefing also provides some important background information about the project's history, timeframes and related projects to critically consider future directions and policy opportunities. The Play Cafe project aligns with the Scottish Government's high priorities and focus to make Scotland the best place for children to grow up.

### **1 The play cafe project: What would Froebelian play cafes look like?**

Dr Konstantoni K (PI, Lead), Research assistants: Dr Reyhaneh Mozaffar, Aggeliki Dimoulia (Network for Children's Rights, Greece), Iffah Humaira Eri Tantawi, Andrea Khalfaoui. Young advisors: Alex, Roujda, Mohammad, Ariana, Konstantinos, Beba. (Further team members and/or advisors: Marlies Kustatscher, Laura Wright and Lynn McNair). Funded by the Froebel Trust and the University of Edinburgh.

# Emerging critical insights

And messages from the play cafe project

## Anxiety and stress from adults

about young children playing in public life and public spaces (especially indoors) with some country specific differences; 'being in the way', 'nowhere to go'; 'no space to play'.

## High quality social and play spaces (especially indoors) do not exist

'there is nowhere to play in this café'; 'we want to play'; 'play all day'.

## Noticeable differences in children's play depending on the environment

## The Froebelian Play Cafe

was considered an ideal social and play space, of high quality; a unique space and experience.

## Not all children have access to the same spaces and experiences

Who they are and where they live matters; e.g. refugee families or recently arrived migrant families who do not speak English or families of colour from low social economic backgrounds feel isolated and do not always access public spaces.

## Power relationships between children and adults or between children, between adults have an impact

on play experiences.

## Children are agents, reclaiming play spaces creatively



## Families face barriers

in accessing current available spaces (due to intersections linked to affordability/ economic barriers; accessibility; location; racial, religious and cultural barriers; not feeling welcomed; language barriers; time/activity restrictions).

## A strong desire for the creation of high-quality Play Cafes;

playing locally is important; as such Play Cafes are needed across diverse communities and neighborhoods

## Play Cafes recognized as an important type of informal high-quality play and social provision in public life

both indoors and outdoors; spaces where both child and parent/carer interact but also spaces where the child can play and the parent/carer relax.

## Outdoor spaces are highly valued, especially natural spaces like the beach, parks, open green spaces

but because of weather they may not always be accessible by all families.

## Feeling safe, having trust, feelings of belonging and community, diversity in resources and staffing, anti-racism anti-discrimination are important

## Ingredients for an ideal social and play space for young children and their families include:

high quality play + high quality play and learning; care, love and relationships matter; design, space and resource matters; pedagogy matters; the space being a 'one stop' for all provision both for young children and adults/carers; knowledge exchange and research; community & social justice matters; the role of the adult matters; human and post-human matters and children's rights.

# Emerging critical insights

And messages from the play cafe project

## Anxiety and stress from adults

about young children playing in public life and public spaces (especially indoors) with some country specific differences; 'being in the way', 'nowhere to go'; 'no space to play'.

“ *I don't feel included sometimes. I sometimes feel intimidated as a grandmother because at some playgroups the nannies group together, the childminders group together and it is impossible to join in their circle* ”

(Interview with Elizabeth, White British, Grandmother and carer of two children under 7)

“ *there is nowhere to play in this cafe, where can we play?* ”

(Max, 6 years old, White Scottish/British Greek)



## Families face barriers

in accessing current available spaces (due to intersections linked to affordability/ economic barriers, accessibility; location; racial, religious and cultural barriers; not feeling welcomed; time restricted or activity-based).

“ *...There are so few play cafes left in Edinburgh, so few free/cheap places to go with small kids. Have to pay through the nose for soft play etc. We really need this! Somewhere relaxed where parents can chat and socialise too* ”

(The Heart of Newhaven, Postcard Feedback)

## High quality social and play spaces do not exist; especially indoors

there is nowhere to play in this café; 'we want to play'; 'play all day'.

“ *Unfortunately, we had to stop going to some of our favorite play spaces because of the cost. It gets expensive for a family of three. It would be fantastic if we had the opportunity to have a play cafe that caters to all families' economic needs* ”

(Interview with Paraskevi, White Greek, mother of a 3 year old child, Greece)



**A strong desire for the creation of high-quality Play Cafes**

playing locally is important so such Play Cafes are needed across diverse communities and neighborhoods.

“It was a shame that we knew this place (We Play Festival play cafe) is only temporary, we came every day, but I knew it's not going to be there the next week, and this was sad”

(Interview with Esaa, Iranian, father of a 3 year old child)

“I thought it (We Play Festival play cafe) was incredible, it was very unique, in a lovely setting and it had a variety of different things that you wouldn't normally see in a typical play cafe ... the work-bench with the real tools, the chance for them to cook, I liked that everything was wooden as well, often it would be more plastic toys... the water feature as well, that was quite unique...”

(Interview with Tasmin, White Scottish mother of two children under 7)

“...this (We Play Festival play cafe) place is amazing! make it permanent!!!”

(We Play Festival, Postcard feedback)

“As a parent of an autistic child I would like it (We Play Festival) to be an ongoing thing, a play cafe throughout the year...”

(Interview with Laoura, White Greek mother of an autistic child, 7 years old)

**Play Cafes recognized as an important type of informal high-quality play and social provision in public life**

both indoors and outdoors; spaces where both child and parent/carer interact but also spaces where the child can play and parent/carer relax.

“just choice of things to do as opposed to one or two things, like having a variety and and things that are creative, I think. That are potentially a bit messy is always good to do outside, because we wouldn't necessarily do those at home and you know what to do with. And the clean up operation after it. So yeah, I think variety is the most important part”

(Interview with Jolly, White Scottish mother of one 6 year old child)

“I want to play, play all day”

Stephanie, 2 years old, White Scottish/British Greek



## Noticeable differences in children's play depending on the environment

“...well I feel that I have been ruined by the play cafe (We play Festival play cafe) (we both laugh), because... he just played so well, he like was so engaged, he loved it, I felt like he was like being enriched all the time and then when I went to view the playgroup, like it was perfectly nice but I was just like 'its no playcafe', it was like in a church hall and the children were like, a lot of them were like crying or being like eh eh you know like wanting the teacher to like do things and ... not that many of them were like sort of into something... (...) maybe if I hadn't gone to the play cafe I would have been like this is great, but I just felt it wasn't, they didn't feel like they were (...) in-depth (concentrating in-depth in play)

(Interview with Veronika, White Scottish mother of 2 mixed race children under 2 years old) ”



## Outdoor spaces are highly valued, especially natural spaces like the beach, parks, open green spaces

but the weather plays a key role & not always accessible by all families.

“When I think of play spaces I think of the indoors and outdoors! A free-flowing space that offers many little “stations” where children can engage in different play activities”

(Interview with Alexandra, White Greek, Mother of a 2.5 year old child, Greece)

“Come with me I want to show you something!! (pulling my hand towards the big windows looking out the garden at the Play Cafe) take me there!! ”

(Moses, 3 year old Iranian boy)



## The Froebelian Play Cafe

was considered an ideal social and play space, of high quality; a unique space and experience.

“This (We Play Festival)! We would love something like this as a regular place to visit and feel it is lacking in our community and in Edinburgh in general ”

(We Play Festival, Postcard feedback)

**Not all children have access to the same spaces and experiences**

“child needs a peaceful environment where they can practice living in a community, play cafe (We Play Festival) provides this environment. Also, there are so many play equipments, which is not available for families in home”

(We Play Festival, Postcard Feedback)

Who they are matters and where they live matters (e.g. refugee families or recently arrived migrant families who do not speak English or families of colour from low socio-economic backgrounds feel isolated and do not always access public spaces).

“Maybe the rich people can pay for the poor people, so that they can come to the play cafe”

(Max, 6 years old, White Other, Scottish/British Greek)

**Power relationships**

between children and adults or between children, between adults impacts on play experiences.



**Feeling safe, trust, feelings of belonging and community, diversity in resources and staffing, and anti-racism and anti-discrimination are important**

“...this (Froebelian Futures mobile play cafe) welcoming as well for like, people who and it doesn't matter if they came from different country, different region of Scotland or even different part of Edinburgh... I felt included, you know.”

(Interview with Asia, White Polish, Community Organisation)

**Children are agents, reclaiming play spaces creatively**



“freedom means to play outside”

Max, 6 years old, White Scottish/British Greek

“why are we doing this Melina, is it for fun? Why are we doing this?”

Matt, 2 years old, Black Scottish (asking Melina about the purpose of their play)

“Shall we go to the square? When are we going to the square? I want to go to the square to play”

(Lampros, White Greek 6 years old)



**Ingredients for an ideal social and play space for young children and their families include:**

high quality play + high quality play and learning; care, love and relationships matter; design, space and resource matters; pedagogy matters; the space being a 'one stop' for all provision both for young children and adults/carers; knowledge exchange and research; community & social justice matters; the role of the adult matters; human and post-human matters and children's rights.

“...those who were hosting this event (We Play Festival) flowing through, it took me a while to realise who is a parent who is a host, I think we met somebody who also had their kid with them. And so there was, of course there's that it's not a firm line. And I thought. I thought that was really nice too ”

(Interview with Kevin, White American, Parent of 10 month old daughter, child bilingual Spanish/American)

“Max: It's a lovely place

*Kristina: What do you like about it?*

*Max: The texture, the way they built it ”*

(Max, 6 years old, White Scottish/British Greek sharing his perspectives about the Botanical gardens and the inside cafe space)

“when are we going to have another play cafe? ”

Max, 6 years old, White Other, Scottish/British Greek





# Background, the identified gap and urgent need

The importance of informal learning experiences beyond institutional environments for children is well-documented (Murray 2021; UNESCO 2020; Borisova 2020). However, despite emerging research and evidence that focuses on public spaces as informal learning sites (Pascal et al 2018), there is still a gap in our understanding of how very young children experience public or semi-public play and social spaces like Play Cafes and other types of community and business family spaces.

The importance of cafes in “fulfilling certain political, cultural and social functions has been acknowledged in the social sciences” as has the vital role that they play in “community life and specifically in the well-being of people who are otherwise marginalised” (Warner, Talbot and Bennison 2012: 306-307; Konstantoni 2022). However, for marginalised populations, such public spaces can also be places of isolation, anxiety and violence (Konstantoni 2022). Within the early years, a ‘kindercafé’/Play Cafe scene has recently emerged (Konstantoni 2022), as a grassroots initiative, created mainly by dissatisfied mothers who wished to address the gap in the market by offering a suitable play space whilst at the same time offering good quality food/drink and a relaxing surrounding for parents/carers whilst the children play.

To date, children’s and families’ experiences of Play Cafes and their politics have not been researched, analysed, or theorised. This is a gap our research seeks to address. Currently, very limited research exists on young children’s experiences of community social and play spaces and enterprises, especially indoor spaces (see for example, for outdoor spaces Play Scotland 2023; Konstantoni 2022). There is even less research on existing play and informal learning public/semi-public indoor spaces for children under two years of age.



However, evidence shows the vital importance of the impact that play in early years has on children’s present/future development (Bruce 2018). For example, high-quality early learning and childcare can act as a protective factor for children against the negative effects of poverty and other intersectional inequalities and improve long-term developmental outcomes (OECD 2018; Garcia et al 2017; Bendini et al 2022). This is particularly important as there is increasing evidence that shows that young children face deep intersectional inequalities and are often deprived of their rights (O’Kane 2016; Konstantoni 2022; United Nations 2023).

Beyond the importance of play as learning, ‘learning through play’, play is also of significance in its own right, as reflected in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Providing spaces that enable quality play provides children not only with a multitude of developmental benefits (Ginsburg, 2007), but also ensures the promotion of their rights under the UNCRC, to which Scotland is a signatory party.

“ *I don’t go anywhere, where can I go? I am at home, always at home* ”

(Interview with Moda, Albanian, recent migrant, parent of three children, two of whom are under 7)

Additionally, according to our research, existing public/semi-public community and business play spaces, especially indoor spaces do not always take into consideration young children’s views in their creation and design. Article 12 of the UNCRC stipulates that “the opinions of children and young people should be considered when people make decisions about things that involve them” (United Nations, 1989).

Hence, there is an evident need to incorporate young children’s perspectives in the design of play and social spaces. Our research includes the perspectives of young children and their families, from the early stages of research to co-designing an equitable, child-community-centred Play Cafe. Further, Moore et al. (2020), found that “inclusivity” is often used arbitrarily when addressing public play spaces in current literature. In this project, we aim to understand children’s and their communities’ perspectives and own definitions of ‘inclusivity’, what makes a space ‘inclusive’. Our emerging findings make the case (similar to others) that we need to move beyond inclusion in early childhood and play, towards equitable and decolonial practices (Arshad 2021; Nxumalo, 2019; Pérez, 2017; Nxumalo, & Cedillo, 2017; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2014).

Considering the limited high-quality public/semi-public play and social spaces available to children and families (as evidenced by our research), there is an urgent need for equitable spaces that promote learning, play and children’s rights, as well as community connectivity and social justice. Thus, as we conceptualize them, **Play Cafes could be innovative informal high-quality and accessible learning, play, and social environments for all children and families, which could provide further spaces for community engagement, research, training/sharing of knowledge, co-working, collaborations and co-production with children, practitioners, other childhood professionals and students. Play Cafes could also be life-affirming spaces and spaces for intergenerational and intersectional activism.**





## A brief history of recognition:

The idea of the play cafe inspired by Froebelian principles emerged from a mum and her young son!

The concept of the play cafe which is inspired by Froebelian principles was coined by Dr Kristina Konstantoni (University of Edinburgh) and her son Alex Bizas when he was around 2, due to a lack of indoor public spaces that were child-centred and underpinned by children's rights philosophies and practices, holistic, open access and were not restricted to a specific activity like a music class. A space that would meet both of their needs; where Alex could play freely and Kristina as a parent could enjoy and relax too.

Kristina and Alex's experience of cafes and other related indoor public spaces for play was very disappointing; they felt that they were not carefully designed to support play and did not all have staff that had the ethos and ways to support children's free play. Kristina and Alex experienced many inequalities whilst accessing public spaces and they also noticed during their research that many of the current public places were not always equitable spaces for communities of colour and for a range of families of various socio-economic and marginalised backgrounds. Alex attended at the time Cowgate Under Fives Centre-Edinburgh (based on a Froebelian approach which values children's rights, child-centred approaches, promotes holistic approaches and where the space is carefully designed to support and nurture play), and Alex and Kristina wondered why these Froebelian principles couldn't apply to other social and play spaces for children and families in public life. Kristina worked in partnership with Cowgate Under Fives, Riverside Cottage Nursery, Community Playthings, Let Me Eat and other University members to co-develop the first pop up play café as part of the Fire Starter Festival.



This led to follow-up pop-up Play Cafes in different communities and neighbourhoods (e.g. Pilton, Leith, Newhaven, Old Town) as part of the [Froebelian Futures project](#) and the [We Play Festival](#)<sup>2</sup> (a collaboration between The University of Edinburgh, The Play Cafe Project, Froebelian Futures and The Scottish Storytelling Centre, supported by a host of other partners aiming to celebrate and promote more child and community centred public spaces in our cities). In total more than **2852** individuals have attended our Play Cafes and relevant pop-up Play Cafe events.

Illustrations by Iffah Humaira ET

### **2 We Play Festival**

Dr Konstantoni K (PI, Lead) and Simon Bateson (Co-PI, Practice lead), Funded by The Froebel Trust and the University of Edinburgh

# Short timeline and background information



2017

## Young Children's Rights in Humanitarian Crisis

Moray House SeedCorn Funding, University of Edinburgh

2018-2019

## Re-imagining the Civic University: Towards an interactive Research-Policy-Practice Centre for the Early Years

Economic and Social Research council Business Booster Funding, College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Edinburgh

2019

## Pop-up play cafe: Part of the Scottish Government and Workforce Scotland's Fire Starter Festival

The Institute For Continuous Improvement Grant

2019

## "How can businesses and public play spaces and cafes be reimagined and reclaimed as socially just rights-reinforcing spaces for children?"

Edinburgh Futures Institute Research Awards

2021

## Delivered in 2023: We Play Festival

College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Knowledge Exchange and Impact Grant, Froebel Trust grant and University of Edinburgh Grant

2021-2024

## Froebelian Futures

The Froebel Trust

2022-2024

Approval of funding 2020

## The Play Cafe Project: What would Froebelian Play Cafes Look like?

The Froebel Trust





# The Play Cafe Project:

2022-2024

Approval of funding 2020

What would Froebelian Play Cafes Look like?

What is a play cafe? Children's perspectives

What do we know about children and play in public life and what are the gaps?

## Objectives

- Understand the current opportunities that children have to play in community and business play spaces and their underlying philosophies and principles
- Explore children's, families', practitioners' and business owners/staff views of play cafes and co-design what Froebelian play cafes may look like



## Research Questions

- What are the current opportunities that young children have to play in community and business play cafes, and their underlying philosophies and principles?
- What are young children's, families', practitioners' and business staff views and experiences about current play cafes, and how would they envision these differently?
- How can we co-design with children, families and practitioners Froebelian play cafes which are inclusive for all?

- 'play cafe, play, babies'  
'play cafe, play little babies, aww babies... so cute'  
'babies huggy, babies eat'  
'play cafe paint'  
'play cafe dance'  
'play cafe play with friends'  
'I love play cafe'  
'I like making coffee'  
'Play cafe play. ●●

Ariana, 2 years old



●● It is for babies, big kids and parents. It has inside and outside (spaces), it has music, it has comfy sofas, sticks, rocket sticks and cooking, I am a chef. ●●

Alex, 6 years old.

- ●● It's somewhere that we can play, for kids, it's like a fun fair, but we don't need to pay, and for grownups, there's a café, and there's so much toys and there's books for grownups, and there's cake for kids if they want in the café... I like the chocolate crispy, it's a bit like cooking somewhere, because I never cooked anywhere in a place, I only cooked at home. ●●

Mohammad, 6 years old

## Our Young Advisors



## Methodology

**Ethnographic** and **participatory** methodological approach with **28 families**, more than **90 sessions** overall, to date (we are aiming for **40 families** in total by the end of the project)

### What have we done so far?

- Developed a conceptual piece; defined play cafes
- Geographical mapping
- We Play Festival community event, including co-design engagement activities to co-design what an ideal social and play space would look like
- Co-design workshop Scotland
- Auto-ethnographic work

### Focusing on young children's perspectives includes adults in their lives + business owners, community groups + practitioners

- 18 interviews with parents/carers (aiming for 40 families)
- 7 interviews with business owners, community groups and practitioners (aiming for 10-14 more)
- 56 interviews with adults that participated in the Froebelian Futures and We Play Festival pop up play cafes; collated and analysed written feedback (286 postcards + email feedback) and 1 group conversation with 5 practitioners

# Designing a Play Cafe

From children's, carers' and practitioners' / professionals' perspectives

As part of our research, our community-based and co-design initiatives, children and parents/carers have shared with us what matters when we create ideal social and play spaces for them. We have named these the ingredients to designing a Play Cafe and include:





# Designing a Play Cafe

From children's, carers' and practitioners' / professionals' perspectives

1

## High-quality play & high-quality play and learning for young children

A space which enables and nurtures deep, unhurried, child-led, independent and interdependent play and intergenerational experiences. A space which enables deep connections, attentiveness as well as a welcoming, anti-racist and anti-discriminatory environment for young children and adults to be in. A space that enables high-quality play and learning opportunities for all children, through its resources and experiences.

“My kids were so deep in their play and very focused. They loved the resources”

(We Play Festival, Postcard feedback)

“...He enjoyed the construction table (woodcraft table), the woodwork and the bookcorner (...) I wish when my son was like toddler or really young, I wish I would have similar events, I wish I would have been to a space like that because it felt very safe for mums as well and very nurturing for children, I wish there were more things like that, and I wish I was aware of that... I think he would have benefited greatly(...)”

(Interview with Laoura, White Greek mother of an autistic child, 7 years old, sharing their experience of We Play Festival play cafe)

“I like to go at the park, because like it has so much toys and it's just like the play cafe”

(Hamid, 6 year old Iranian boy)

“... It's so hard to find free/cheap new things to take the kids to, soft play is very expensive for 2 kids over 3 years!”

(We Play Festival, Postcard feedback)

“I am bored (of softplay)... can we play outside?”

Matt 2 years old, Black Scottish





“ it would be a space that 1) would embrace neurodivergent children and I wish I would have like a solid network of mums or other parents anyways with the children that we can hang out, a non judgemental space, a safe space basically with other parents and families that we can talk and for our children to play or share grievances”

(Interview with Laoura, White Greek mother of an autistic child, 7 years old)



“ I love the play cafe ”

Stephanie, 2 years old, White Scottish/British Greek

“...we try other playgroups but firstly I feel that it is just a place where they have dumped a few toys together and they just leave the kids to run around and she doesn't really enjoy it very much and she doesn't interact with other children there which she did at the play cafe (We Play Festival). She interacted really well with other children older than her and younger than her so that was a big difference from these spaces that we go to (...) I realised that she was completely in her own zone coz she took all her clothes off I mean she wouldn't do that anywhere else but she felt so at home it was like being at home, she was really comfortable... she felt so at home there that she can just be herself... if you go to these other spaces they are quite judgemental I find as well they are looking at how you are reacting to a child's behaviour”

(Interview with Elizabeth, White British, Grandmother and carer of two children under 7)



A high quality space that is beautiful (natural and simple), designed by the members of the community and young children and suits their needs and curiosities. A space that is culturally relevant and responsive. The design of the play space provides a flow of interconnected and holistic rich experiences for young children, through the resources and experiences available.

**“Lovely use of space and much needed city play space for kids to freely play, choose what they are interested in”**

(We Play Festival, Postcard feedback)

**“such a considered space... it's been really thought carefully about how everything is and where everything is”**

(Interview with Mary, White Scottish, Practitioner, sharing her perspective about the Froebelian Futures mobile play cafe)

Natural resources (such as wood, neutral colours and the open-ended materials) are used to support young children's learning, independent and interdependent play. The design of the space also creates a sense of calmness, comfort and curiosity. The design of the space accommodates different types of energy (from intense and speed, to more slow, introspective moments). The design of the space is flexible and for multiple uses. The space includes child-size furniture (e.g. child-size table and chairs, sofas, woodcraft tools etc) and other resources (e.g. cups, cutlery).

**“It (We Play Festival) is quite a comfortable and beautiful decoration event, so we just have been here once or twice so for me it is similar to some toys in the nursery or in some playgroups but the difference is that I think it feels more relaxed and more how do you say warm yeah here, than just pure toys, I think also the stuffs are more professional, also the decoration of the place is superb, all the wooden is very good yeah... we are growing up in a different culture so this kind of playground we don't have that in our childhood play space so we find this very happy and very good for kids a safe environment to play in (...) I liked it I really enjoyed it a lot”**

(Interview with Wei, Chinese, Father, recent migrant parent of one child under 5)



“ Materials and safety are very important to me, some of the playgrounds we visit are disintegrating and no one does anything to fix it ”

(Interview with Giannis, White Greek father of 2.5 year old child, Greece)

“ I like the backing area and the blocks and like like the cakes and I also like the water tray ”

(Hamid, 6 year old Iranian boy)



“ Το γεγονός ότι ήταν ένας χώρος που είχε πολύ ξυλο και είχε λίγα χρώματα δεν ήταν έντονος χώρος, δεν το βρήκα έντονο χώρο ακόμα και εμένα την ίδια που είμαι νεύρο τυπική μπήκα μέσα κ μου έβγαλε κάτι ζεστό, άνετο και όχι overstimulating , non overstimulating ... ήταν πολύ ωραίος χώρος και επίσης ήταν η πρόσβαση εύκολη

(English Translation)

The fact that it was a space that had a lot of wood and had a few colours (pause) it wasn't an intense space, I didn't find it an intense space, even for me who is neurotypical, I came inside and it made me feel warm, comfortable and not overstimulating... it was a very beautiful space and it was also accessible ”

(Interview with Laoura, White Greek mother of an autistic child, 7 years old)





### 3

## Care, Love and Relationship Matters

A space which has a welcoming and warm atmosphere, with caring, loving, knowledgeable and critical reflective adults who significantly contribute to the long-lasting relationships that are built between the space and the community.

“It was truly a unique experience because I've been knowing these families (Afghan Refugee families) for months... what was really special was how they trusted the space I explained to them this is connected to the University and I am going to be there or that we just welcome families and you are very welcome to come, just the fact that they felt so welcomed in this space was very unique, they blended in very quickly with people and the children were freely playing within the space, all of these aspects were very unique and I know that these families are mainly in the hotel not really going to any specific social places or play spaces, I know they spend most of their time at the hotel or some of the events that the x association runs for them... so they don't really blend into the city yet, they haven't been successfully blended into the city yet but I think this was a really unique space that provided that sort of environment for them”

(Interview with Fatima, Iranian, Organiser)



“One of the things and actually what I really like in your approach was really, you were kind of like a kindly ghosts! ... so being there but like very in a very gently way and then letting parents to come to you rather than you coming to parents”

(Interview with Asia, White Polish, Community Organisation, sharing her perspectives about the Froebelian Futures mobile play cafe)

“ It (We Play Festival play cafe) was a very inclusive space and I think the practitioners and everybody involved made it like that you get that feeling as you walk into the play cafe, as an example I go to another coffee shop ehm well its not a playcafe its just in a church hall, they have and they are segregated, they will sit like the nannies, the nannies who work as nannies not grandmothers all congregate together, the childminders all congregate together and then the grandparents tend to sit somewhere else so that is very weird for me they all have their own little corner with the children and its a real effort to get into their group ... which is quite a hostile environment if you haven't been there before ”

(Interview with Elizabeth, White British, Grandmother and carer of two children under 7)



“ Its just such a serene atmosphere (We Play Festival play cafe), it is very calming and it was a very friendly space for everybody, I think Melina thrived in that space compared to other spaces that we go to because there is no option they are the only places that are available for us so she can meet children... ”

(Interview with Elizabeth, Grandmother and carer of two children under 7)



Velory below is sharing her experience of existing public/semi-public social spaces:

“ We went once with the children haven't been back since. Because first off, there's a big sign they do not lock up buggies here or something right on the railing. So that kind of puts you off a little bit. And then there's like stairs down... and then like we had to wait to be seated. And of course the kids were trying to run off in all directions and then the menus like, you know I don't...

...We didn't feel as welcome in there as perhaps, whereas I understand in the past they used to have a little toy corner and they used to really welcome. They had that before COVID, but then took it away because of cleaning it or I don't know, whatever. And then never brought it back, I guess because they could fit more tables in and more covers and stuff. ”

(Interview with Velory, White British mother of 2 children under 6)



## 4

### Pedagogy Matters

The importance of having a Play Cafe space which is underlined by a principled approach to learning, playing and being. The Play Cafe space provides opportunities to practice child-led, free play, slow and social justice pedagogies as well as 'freedom with guidance' in supporting children's play and learning. A space which supports risks and creativity in play as well as opportunities for outdoor and indoor play. A space which supports 'hands on' and everyday real experiences e.g. cooking. A space which enables young children to express their inner and outer worlds through their experiences.

*...they (children) are actually leading what this play equipment is offering rather than the play equipment saying 'okay I am this so play with me in this way...'*

(Interview with Fatima, Iranian Mother of two children under 6)

*...there was no one rushing over saying 'don't do that', it seem quite free and very easy and she could roam around...'*

(Interview with John, White English, Father of a 2 year old child)

## 5

### Role of the Adult

A space which recognises the crucial role of an adult in children's play, through 'freedom with guidance'. A space which allows all adults (e.g. parents, carers and practitioners) to step back and enable children's independent and interdependent free play. A space which enables adults to safeguard and materialize young children's rights such as their rights to provision, participation and protection.



*Or go to the x as well, because they made suitable places for being parents and kids together at the same time. And the most important thing that I'm really interested in; there playing, is you can play with your children.'*

(Interview with Laleh, Iranian mother of one 5 year old child)



# 5

## Community and Social Justice

A space which all children and families of different social backgrounds and life stories (e.g. nationalities, ethnicities, race, disability, gender, age, religion, cultures, socio-economic backgrounds and others) are welcome to use together, enhancing a sense of belonging. A space which respects diversity, and practices anti-racism and anti-discrimination.

“It is a nice place (outdoor play space in Greece) but there are no friends so I don't like it so much here”  
 (Max 6 years old, White Scottish/British Greek in Greece)



“...more please, more of this please, it was amazing, we want more please”

(Interview with Aida, Migrant, Black, Single mum of two children under 7)

“I don't want to be judged for this (pointing to the hijab), I don't want to be judged for who I am when I go into spaces...”

Not being asked to take hijab off

(We Play Festival , Play Cafe & 'Whose space series: Children's Play in Public Life' Community and family Co-design workshop, What is your idea of an inclusive play and social space? 20 Sep 2023)





*People are looking at you if your kids are screaming right? So you know, like that you don't want to, people are coming, you feel that people are coming there to have a relaxing time and then your kids...*

*...I might go to those restaurants with my coworkers. But with my children, I prefer not to go to those places or, but I don't feel comfortable and I feel that people are not child friendly...*

*...I was going to say active and I feel that OK, soft plays keep them active but physically active. But I would prefer them to be physically active in an open space like a farm to go around the farm and if I want them to be active, I might just send them to a Sports Club. So they say rather than you know me, because I feel that if I go to a play cafe, I'm going to be there looking at them. So I feel that, you know, also that sort of the interaction part matters to me, a lot...*

*...Being a Muslim, having you know food that is that we can eat and I think it's not just Muslims. So if you're Jewish, there are particular food that you eat or not. So basically all vegetarian, vegetarian is more common in the UK, so it's not a sort of thing to get, but basically you know having these, yeah, things also those things feel that it's also important... ”*

(Interview with Hanna, Iranian mother of two children under 8)





# 7

## A One Stop Space for all provisions both for young children and adults/carers

A shared space that is equitable and accessible. A space for connection which enhances social cohesion (e.g. through free food, cultural & musical gatherings, through cooking together) and which meets the needs of all children and their communities. A space to gather, connect and get easy access to various services, informal support (e.g. mental health and well-being support, pre-natal, post-natal support) and information.



# 8

## Knowledge exchange & Research

A space for adults and children to interact and share experiences and knowledge, both formally and informally in an easy, accessible and comfortable space. A space for learning and unlearning experiences through various cultures and practices from different members of the community both locally, nationally and globally.

*Unique space - safe for kids to play with other children while parents can sit with a cuppa. Nice and relaxed and informal unlike other "baby groups" or the library or expensive cafes*

(The Heart of Newhaven Froebelian Futures play cafe, Postcard Feedback)

*...the whole experience itself was very, heart-warming in a way, because I was able to communicate with parents and children at the same time*

(Interview with Nur, Postgraduate Student, Malaysian, about her perspectives of the Froebelian Futures play cafe)



## Human and Post-Human Matters

“...there wasn't like, it was the sound wasn't like an adult talking about how things were going to be, or directing or anything the general sound was like a hum, a mixture of parents and carers having a conversation between themselves and children speaking and just experiencing and so.”

(Interview with Rose, White British/Scottish Practitioner sharing her experience of the Froebelian Futures mobile play cafe)

The Play Cafe space crucially highlights the importance of both human and post-human matters in enabling communities to feel connected in a space for everyone to be in. While the presence of humans and interactions is crucial, the significance of the lighting design (e.g. fairy lights, warm lights, natural light), the smell essences from the humidifier (e.g. lavender), or the flowers, the textures and natural elements (e.g. sand and water), sounds (e.g. calm music), animals, and food were also mentioned as important other-than-human elements of making the space warm, relaxing, calm, soothing, safe, welcoming and enriching.

“wonderful, peaceful, very thoughtful, the fairy lights were beautiful”

(We Play Festival, Postcard feedback)

## Children's rights

The Play Cafe space respects, safeguards and materializes children's rights (e.g. rights to provision, participation and protection)



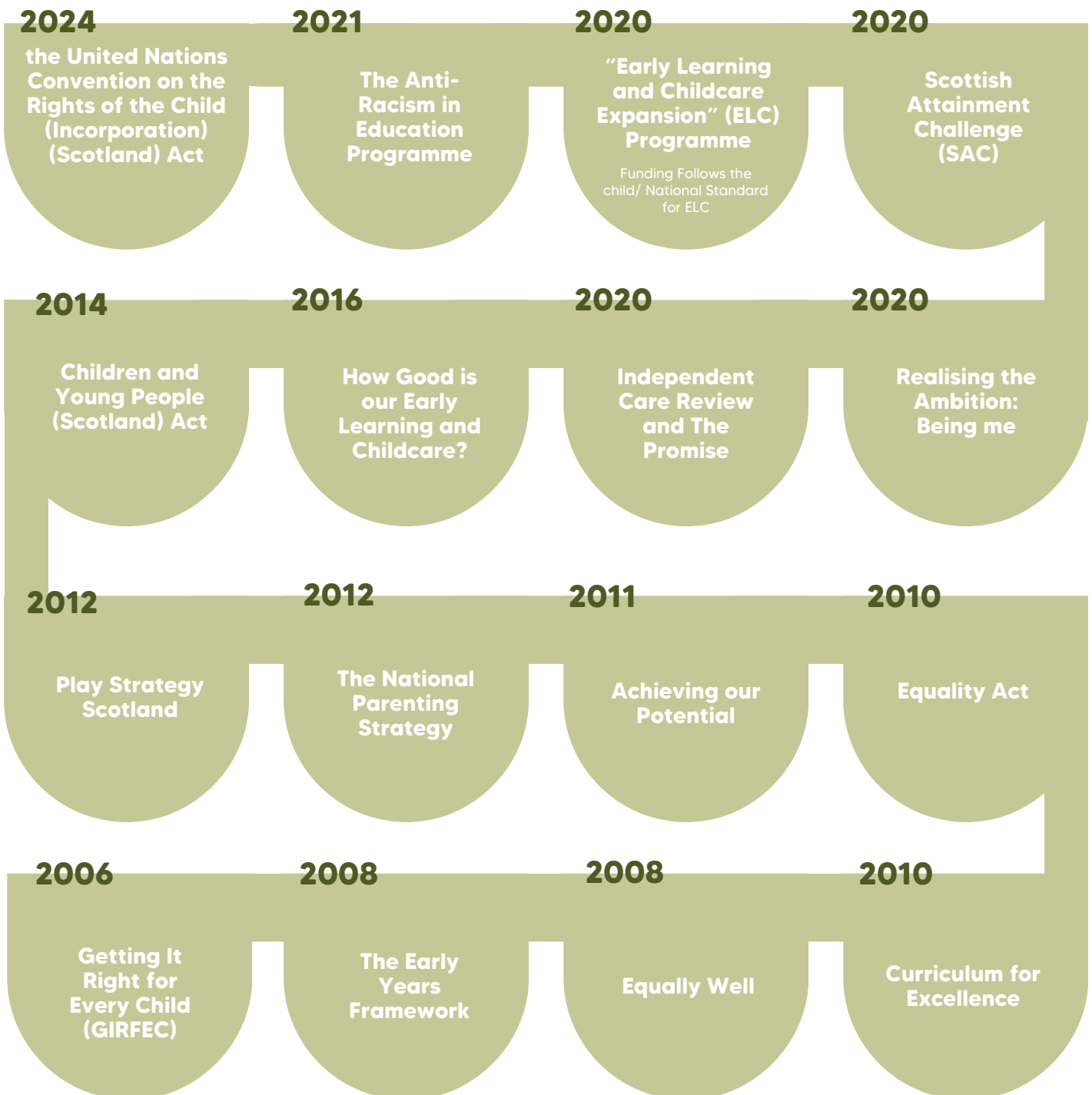


# Future Vision



The evidence is very clear from our work that **high-quality social and play spaces do not exist**. Our future vision is to create **more permanent free high-quality Play Cafe spaces** for families with young children across diverse communities. This vision is rooted in respect for human rights, children’s rights and social justice, values shared by the project and the Scottish Government, as exemplified by its policy priorities.

## Policies and Acts



# Future Vision, Reflective Thoughts and Suggested Actions

Play Cafes could provide potential collaborations between universities (e.g. University of Edinburgh), private sector organizations and businesses, community organisations (e.g. The Heart of Newhaven Community, Homestart Edinburgh, Multi-Cultural Family Base, etc.) research communities, and the government. This can be seen through our recent **“We Play Festival”<sup>2</sup>**, which brought together (more than **1500**) young children, families, researchers, children’s rights activists, organizations and communities together to share and exchange knowledge.

In light of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) Act 2024, there is a need to take action in safeguarding and materializing children’s rights. Play in public spaces and communities further constitutes a key priority for the Scottish Government (Play Scotland 2012; Play Scotland 2024) as play is fundamental for children’s health and well-being, improves attainment and reduces inequality (Play Scotland 2022). **Although there is a lot to celebrate about Scotland’s world-leading policy framework for play, there is still “a lot of work to do and many challenges to overcome to deliver” this vision for all children** (Play Scotland 2022). Through this project and guided by the young children, their families and their communities from various backgrounds, we are hoping to **critically rethink and disrupt current White Western ideals about what quality, equitable play spaces mean**. In order to make Scotland the best place for children to grow up in, it is **imperative to decolonise our minds, processes and practices in early childhood and play**.

The importance of creating equitable and accessible high-quality play spaces for young children would play a significant role in integrating children’s rights into Scotland’s policy and practice. Our findings are clear that there is an urgent need for communities to gain access to these forms of play spaces to support children’s play and learning, and the well-being of the community.



<sup>2</sup> We Play Festival  
Dr Konstantoni K (PI, Lead) and Simon Bateson (Co-PI, Practice lead), funded by The Froebel Trust and the University of Edinburgh



# Future Vision, Reflective Thoughts and Suggested Actions

## Reflective thoughts

Through this project we have been learning about:

- young children's and their communities' emerging understandings and lived experiences of what is meant by quality play and learning** for them,
- how **play cafes and family spaces** are being defined and experienced by them and
- what young children and their communities believe are play cafes' purposes, objectives and aims.

The project aims to co-design what **play cafes may look like from young children's and their communities' perspectives** in the context of Greece and Scotland. Understanding the various nuances and intersectional conceptualisations around 'high quality' play is a complex practice as it evolves over time (Nxumalo 2019; Viruru 2001) and it also needs to be decolonised (Nxumalo, 2019) by critically reflecting on and disrupting the dominance of universalist, White Western and Eurocentric ideals (Sarma 2023; Nxumalo 2019; Viruru 2001; Pacini-Ketchabaw 2014).

Decolonisation is a 'critical analysis of how colonial forms of knowledge, pedagogical strategies and research methodologies... have shaped what we know, what we recognise and how we reward such knowledge accordingly' (Arshad, 2020). It is important to acknowledge 'the effects of colonialism, racism and epistemicide (the killing of knowledge systems)', and seek 'to remove those influences' (Arshad 2021).



## What does this mean for us in this context?

- How do we decolonise Froebelian early childhood pedagogical practices? Can we?
- How can we offer high quality play spaces and at the same time disrupt the use of a universal checklist (which is influenced by white Euro-centric Western practices) (Viruru 2001; Nxumalo 2019; Pacini-Ketchabaw 2014) in creating existing play spaces for children?
- Through this project, how are we going to learn from those who have been engaging in this work of decolonisation (within and beyond early childhood), to decolonise our own minds, processes and practices? What does this mean practically?

# Future Vision, Reflective Thoughts and Suggested Actions



## Reflective thoughts

As we take this work further we will:

- **continue to learn and unlearn through critical reflexivity and relational ethics/power**, by continuous engagement with work from communities of colour and indigenous knowledges and with a range of families from Greece and Scotland to understand intersectional embodied knowledges, local cultures and a range of life stories. For example during the We Play Festival we collaborated and co-designed a workshop entitled 'Whose space?' with Ashaanka, a young person of colour, and Iffah, a postgraduate student of colour on our MSc in Education (Early Childhood Practice and Froebel pathway) degree.

## Whose Space Series: "Whose Spaces?"

Ashaanka Sarma, Kristina Konstantoni and Iffah Humaira Eri Tantawi

A place where we can have a discussion about spaces for children and families, ask any questions without judgment, and where people can come with an open mind and an open heart.

"Hi, I am Ashaanka and I am 15 years old. I want to help children of color feel more included in our society."

Ashaanka's questions for the event:

- 'Are our spaces safe and 'inclusive' for children of color to play in?
- What does inclusion mean to you?
- What makes a space child-friendly?

Audience: Carers/Parents, Practitioners, Policymakers

25th September 2023 The Storytelling Court @ The Storytelling Centre





# Future Vision, Reflective Thoughts and Suggested Actions



## Reflective thoughts

We would like to acknowledge that on the one hand there is a need to learn from/with families to disrupt hegemonic practices and on the other hand this process is embedded in power imbalances between ourselves and communities, which allows **us** the privilege to learn and grow.

Through this process, we are going to share our learning with children and families in various multimodal ways, through resources which will be created with the advice of our young advisory team and participants (e.g. storybooks for young children, briefings, and audio-visual approaches) to ensure there is value for all involved. We will also push for the creation of such play cafe spaces for families.

- **be open to dialogue and critical reflective practice of our own intersectional positionalities and what these mean for us as a diverse team** (e.g. White British Greek, Iranian, Malaysian, White Greek) and how it is a continuous process of understanding the privileges and power we hold in certain spaces (alongside the disadvantages in other spaces). This includes an analysis of how Whiteness and internalised Whiteness operates and what we can do practically to continuously dismantle White superiority and power in early childhood.



# Future Vision and Suggested Actions

Research and Practice Opportunities



We propose the below actions:

1

**Allocation of funding** for the creation of long-term (3-5 years) pilot Play Cafe(s), based on the findings of this project.

2

**Investment in ongoing research funds** to identify best practices of sustainable social enterprise business models, scaling up models for the creation of additional permanent Play Cafes across Scotland.

3

**Investment in funding for research** including **prospective doctoral students and post-doctoral researchers** to provide longitudinal research studies and evidence of the short-, mid- and long-term impact of Play Cafes. The research produced will add significant knowledge to the Play Cafe literature and literature linked to play in public and semi-public spaces and life.

4

**Investment in opportunities for training in early childhood** and human rights/children's rights, anti-racism, decolonial and child-community centred approaches in public/semi-public play spaces





Warm messages from parents about the We Play Festival...



*I wanted to take a moment to extend my warmest congratulations to your team for the remarkable success you have achieved with your latest initiative (We Play Festival)... It's truly impressive to see the dedication and hard work that you have put into it — we visited it twice and my son and his friend had the most memorable time learning, playing independently, and exploring.*

*Having witnessed the positive outcomes of your initiative, I believe that it would greatly benefit the community I currently reside in (x), if we could have a similar setup permanently established here — I believe it could have a profound impact as well. It would contribute to enhancing the quality of life for our residents and creating a more vibrant and thriving environment for our children. This opinion is shared by several friends who have also had the opportunity to visit you at the Scottish Storytelling Centre recently.*

*I understand that such an endeavour requires careful planning, resources, and support. I would be more than willing to collaborate with you and your team, in any way I can, to explore the possibility of implementing a similar initiative in our community.*

*Once again, congratulations on your well-deserved success*



Warm messages from parents about the We Play festival...



*Hello,*

*I am writing to thank you for your extraordinary pop-up event this week at the Scottish Storytelling Centre (We Play Festival). I brought my 10-month-old daughter to play at your event today, and we had an absolute blast. The workshop staff, the available toys, the general atmosphere, the activity stations — everything was refreshing, calm, and engaging. Thank you for a lovely experience.*

*I am writing, also, to see if there are similar events planned for the future. I deeply wish there were some way to spend afternoons at a place centre like the one your team has curated several times a week. Are there any future plans for a more permanent installation? Similarly, are there any existing nurseries in Edinburgh that you recommend that espouse a similar pedagogy?*

*Thank you for a lovely afternoon.  
Wishing you a wonderful  
rest of the week.*





Warm messages from young children about the Play Cafe...

**“ Let’s skip school to go to the  
playcafe, let’s skip school  
everyday to go to the playcafe ”**

**Max 6 years old, White Scottish/British Greek**











Please note that many of the concepts in this briefing are contested in the literature. Below we provide some working definitions for this briefing.

Term	Definition
<b>anti-discrimination</b>	An approach (policy and practice) and praxis which prevents and challenges discrimination for personal characteristics (e.g. age, gender, marital status, pregnancy, disability, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation).
<b>anti-racism</b>	An approach (policy and practice) and praxis that identifies, addresses, opposes, challenges racism and white hegemonic structures; proactively preventing and challenging racism that exists in our society.
<b>care and love</b>	As defined by bell hooks (2000) in her book 'All About Love', care and love are viewed as transformative forces and political actions towards social justice. We define love based on hooks (2000) as : To love is to be open and honest, caring, affectionate, we show responsibility, respect, commitment and trust (hooks 2000).
<b>child-centred, child-led, child-directed approaches</b>	<p>Approaches that keep in focus, and involve working closely with, the children and their families/communities when making decisions about their lives, such as planning curriculum or experiences based on children's needs, curiosities and interests. Child-centred approaches are linked to the realisation of children's rights. For example, General Comment 1 on the aims of education highlight that: 'education must be child-centred and empowering' in terms of its curriculum, educational processes, pedagogical methods and the environment; education must respect children's dignity and enables the child to express their views and to participate; education promotes non-violence (UNICEF, n.d). <a href="https://www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/the-right-to-education/">https://www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/the-right-to-education/</a></p> <p>Child-centred approaches involve understanding the impact of interacting oppressions and marginalisation, working through conflict, recognising biases and systemic advantages and challenging white hegemonic narratives and dominant thinking (see Intersectionality).</p>
<b>cultural relevant and responsive</b>	Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies recognize the importance of including children's cultural references in all aspects of learning (Ladson-Billings 1995). For example, using resources and cultural references that children use in their everyday life to unpack bias, challenge discrimination, racism, white superiority e.g. books, music, play resources etc or introduce additional resources.



Please note that many of the concepts in this briefing are contested in the literature. Below we provide some working definitions for this briefing.

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Term	Definition
<b>free play</b>	<p>Children are free to 'think for themselves, make choices, solve problems and pursue their own interests' at their own pace. Children are free to be, 'to move, explore, play, create, participate and to learn at their own pace'. Free play encourages the child to be, to explore how things work, through purposeful activities which are active, hands-on and of interest to the individual child. Free play is not synonymous to do 'anything and everything' as freedom operates 'within a framework of responsibility and respect for others, the resources and the natural environment' (Tovey, 2017).</p> <p><a href="https://www.froebel.org.uk/uploads/documents/FT-Froebels-principles-and-practice-today.pdf">https://www.froebel.org.uk/uploads/documents/FT-Froebels-principles-and-practice-today.pdf</a></p> <p>Free play involves sensitive adult guidance to work through conflict, recognition of biases and systemic advantages and challenging white hegemonic narratives and dominant thinking (see Intersectionality; freedom with guidance).</p>
<b>freedom with guidance</b>	<p>Children play freely and at their own pace with adults close by who support, sensitively, actively and gently guide, and extend their play. Children are recognised as unique and autonomous and have a strong supportive community. Children's freedom operates within a framework of responsibility and respect for others, the resources and the natural environment.</p> <p><a href="https://www.froebel.org.uk/uploads/documents/FT-Froebels-principles-and-practice-today.pdf">https://www.froebel.org.uk/uploads/documents/FT-Froebels-principles-and-practice-today.pdf</a></p> <p>Freedom with guidance involves sensitive adult intervention to work through conflict, recognise biases and systemic advantages and challenge white hegemonic narratives and dominant thinking (see Intersectionality).</p>
<b>hegemonic whiteness</b>	<p>Systems that privilege white people and their thoughts, actions, functions, outcomes of institutions and systems.</p>
<b>inner and outer worlds</b>	<p>Inner worlds of children refers to their emotions, feelings, thoughts, ideas and make meaning, while the outer worlds refer to the world of things and experiences around them.</p>
<b>intergenerational</b>	<p>A term used to highlight the interactions and relations between members within different generations (e.g. between children and adults).</p>
<b>intersectionality</b>	<p>Critical analytical tool and praxis to understand the impact of interacting social categories (e.g. race, disability, class, ag, gender) in relation to power and intersecting oppressions and marginalisation; this also includes 'a counter-hegemonic praxis that seeks to challenge and displace hegemonic whiteness in the naming and legitimating of particular kinds of politics, policy-making and knowledge production (Konstantoni and Emejulu 2017: p.8).</p>

Please note that many of the concepts in this briefing are contested in the literature. Below we provide some working definitions for this briefing.

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Term	Definition
<b>pedagogy</b>	<p>Pedagogy is the process and activity of educating, parenting or generally living and being with children ‘that requires constant practical acting in concrete situations and relations’ (van Manen, 1990: 2). Pedagogy relates to the “how”, or practice of educating or facilitating learning experiences (Siraj-Blatchford et al. 2002; Wall, Litjens, Taguma 2015: 4). Pedagogy is not neutral. Pedagogy ‘is organized around knowledge built on situated action and infused with theories and beliefs (beliefs, values and principles)... (Oliveira-Formosinho and Formosinho 2012: 1). For example, participatory pedagogical approaches focus on ‘the actors who co-construct knowledge by participating in the learning process’ (Oliveira-Formosinho and Formosinho 2012: 1).</p>
<b>play</b>	<p>According to General Comment No. 17 (UNCRC, 2013, p.5-6) play is defined as ‘any behaviour, activity or process initiated, controlled and structured by children themselves; it takes place whenever and wherever opportunities arise. Caregivers may contribute to the creation of environments in which play takes place, but play itself is non-compulsory, driven by intrinsic motivation and undertaken for its own sake, rather than as a means to an end. Play involves the exercise of autonomy, physical, mental or emotional activity, and has the potential to take infinite forms, either in groups or alone. These forms will change and be adapted throughout the course of childhood. The key characteristics of play are fun, uncertainty, challenge, flexibility and non-productivity. Together, these factors contribute to the enjoyment it produces and the consequent incentive to continue to play. While play is often considered non-essential, the Committee reaffirms that it is a fundamental and vital dimension of the pleasure of childhood, as well as an essential component of physical, social, cognitive, emotional and spiritual development’.</p> <p>Froebelian approaches also argue that play ‘is never trivial’ and that ‘it is deeply serious’ (Powell and Louis 2020). ‘Play is the most important resource that children have to help them grow, learn and connect with people, the world around them and their imagination (...). Froebel described play as “the highest expression of human development in childhood, for it alone is the free expression of what is in the child’s soul” (Powell and Louis 2020).</p>
<b>post-humanism</b>	<p>A conceptualisation that aims to decentre the human, acknowledges the relational aspects of existence (e.g. human, other-than-humans, technology, climate change, the cosmos, materialities, animals, plants, trees, nature, culture, places, times, histories etc) and rejects dualisms (e.g. mind/body; male/female; nature/culture).</p>
<b>principled approach</b>	<p>An approach which is underlined and guided by principles. For example, see Froebelian principles here: <a href="https://www.froebel.org.uk/about-us/froebelian-principles">https://www.froebel.org.uk/about-us/froebelian-principles</a></p>
<b>public spaces</b>	<p>Public spaces include open spaces, beach, parks, streets, squares, sidewalks and footpaths that connect, pavements, seafronts and promenades, playgrounds, marketplaces, spaces between buildings or roadsides that anyone can use and access in principle for free.</p>

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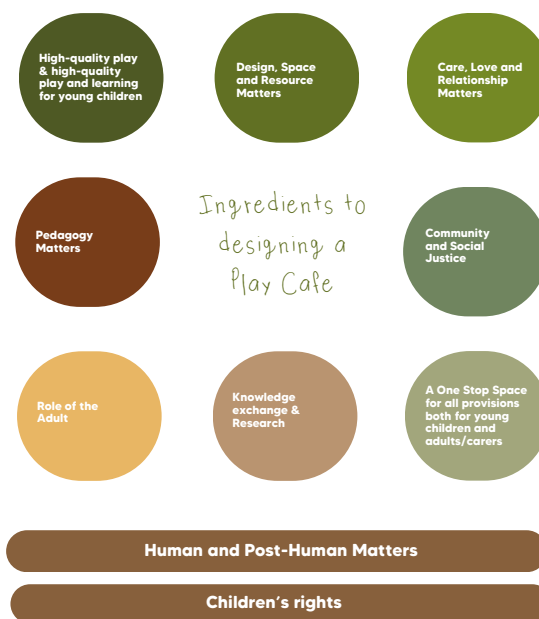


Please note that many of the concepts in this briefing are contested in the literature. Below we provide some working definitions for this briefing.

Term	Definition
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**quality**

The concept of quality is a contested term. In this briefing we define quality based on children’s, families’ and practitioners’ perspectives and experiences in different geographical locales and from different backgrounds. According to children, their families and practitioners’ high quality is linked to: experiences, relationships and the nature of these interactions, processes, spaces and places, design and resources, pedagogical practices, provisions, community and social justice matters, sharing of knowledge and research and the role of the adult. Human and post-human matters transgress all of the above and are important elements of high quality alongside the realisation of children’s rights. These are presented visually below and explained briefly in pages 12-24.



**semi-public spaces**

Semi-public spaces are open to the public but have a certain private element to them e.g. privately owned coffee shop, a soft-play, restaurants or shopping centres, malls. Semi-public spaces may also include libraries, community centres, castles, museums, galleries, adventure parks, country parks. Some semi-public spaces may also have an entry fee or may have specific rules of conduct regulating what is considered acceptable behaviour.

**social cohesion**<sup>3</sup>

A sense of belonging and a space for communities to come together while recognising differences, inequities and inequalities that contribute to power imbalances. A space that works towards being anti-racist and anti-discriminatory and which works towards building solidarity amongst spaces and people. Social cohesion involves working through conflict, recognising biases and systemic advantages and challenging white hegemonic narratives and dominant thinking (see Intersectionality).

<sup>3</sup> Thank you to Pavithra Sarma for providing feedback and critical thoughts on this working definition, which we have included within the definition.

Please note that many of the concepts in this briefing are contested in the literature. Below we provide some working definitions for this briefing.

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Term	Definition
<b>social justice pedagogical approaches</b>	<p>Social justice pedagogical approaches in this briefing are defined as pedagogical approaches that are critical, reflective, participatory, decolonial and intersectional in the creation and exchange of knowledge and understanding, in their processes of facilitating learning experiences and practices. Social justice approaches which recognise differences, inequities and structures of power, including white hegemonic practices, and work towards being anti-racist and anti-discriminatory. Approaches that are committed to learning and unlearning, reflection and 'the ability to recognise oppressive structures, to take on feedback and experiences from people who are racialised as Black and as People of Colour' and 'the ability to take new input on board, translate it into improving... praxis and to envision new and non-oppressive ways of being' (Farukuoye 2021) (<a href="https://scotdec.org.uk/download/anti-racist-toolkit-for-teachers/">https://scotdec.org.uk/download/anti-racist-toolkit-for-teachers/</a>).</p> <p>Social justice pedagogical approaches work through conflict, recognise biases and systemic advantages and challenge white hegemonic narratives, processes, practices and dominant thinking. Social justice approaches are committed to creating equitable relationships, spaces, processes, practices, policies and encouraging adults, children and their communities to challenge and transform unequal power relations. Pedagogical approaches seek to understand the impact of interacting social categories (e.g. race, disability, class, ag, gender) in relation to power and intersecting oppressions and marginalisation.</p>



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# The Play Cafe Project

## Briefing

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