

Learning through play

"Children learn as they play. Most importantly, in play children learn how to learn." Fred Donaldson (1)

"Investing in children's play is one of the most important things we can do to improve children's health and wellbeing in Scotland."

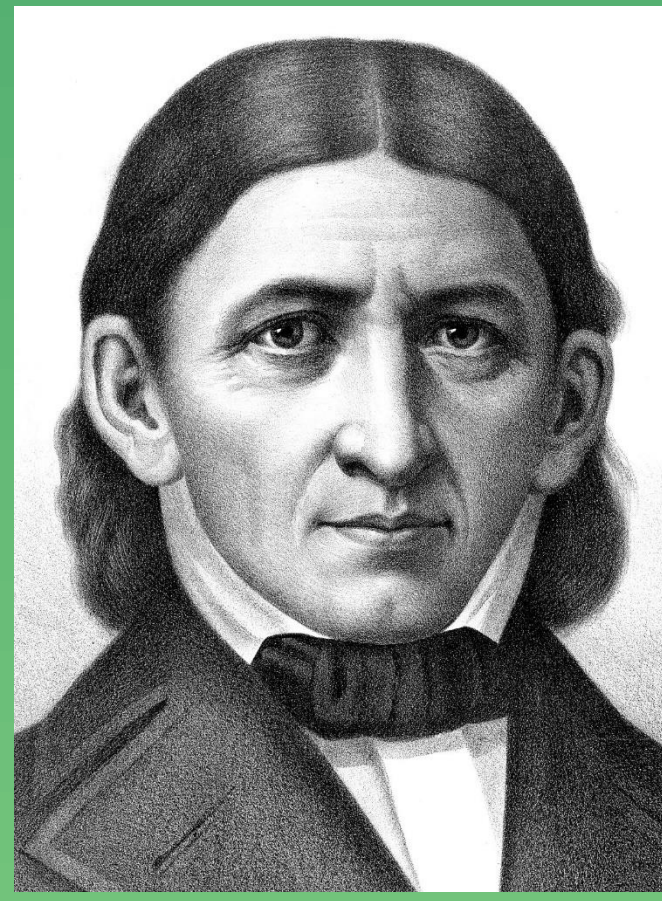
Professor Sir Harry Burns,
Former Chief Medical Officer in Scotland (2)



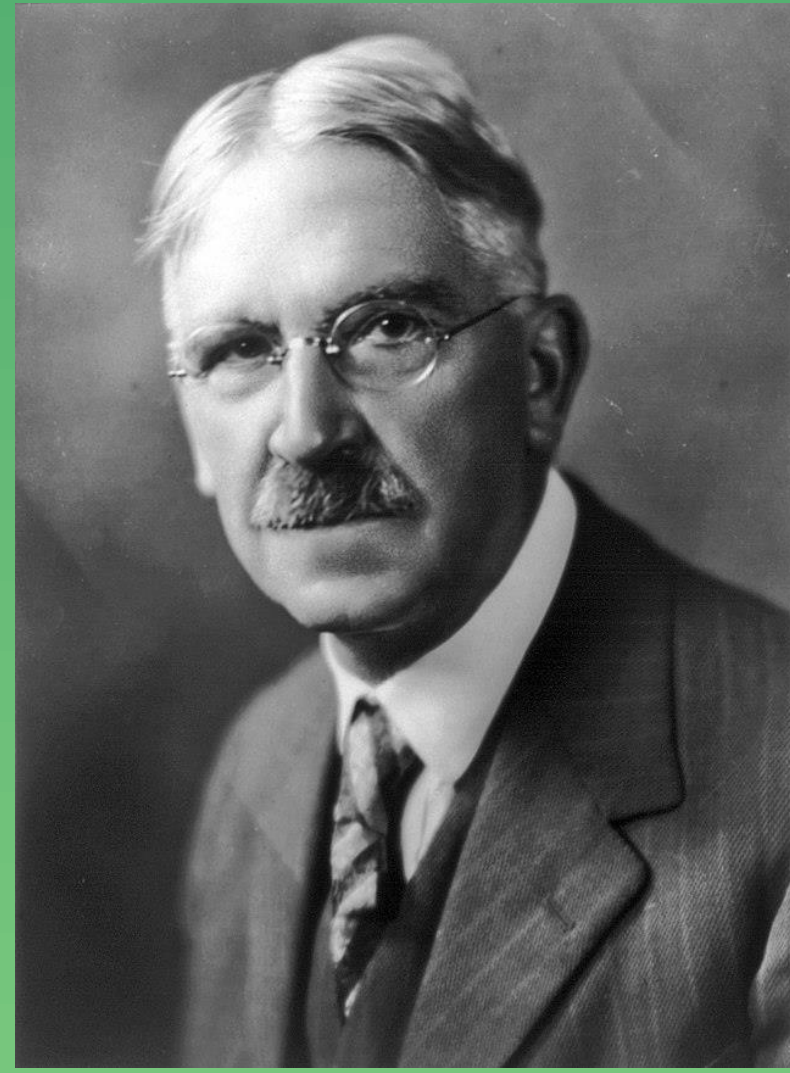
Key thinkers on learning and play:



Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827)
Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Swiss social reformer and educator, is known as the Father of Modern Education. ... He wanted to provide children with an education which would make them independent and able to improve their own lives. Pestalozzi believed that education should develop the powers of 'Head', 'Heart' and 'Hand'. (7)



Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852)
The German educator Friedrich Froebel is significant for developing an Idealist philosophy of early childhood education and establishing the kindergarten, a school for 4 and 5 year old children that is found worldwide. According to Froebel, in play children construct their understanding of the world through direct experience with it. His ideas about learning through nature and the importance of play have spread throughout the world. (8)



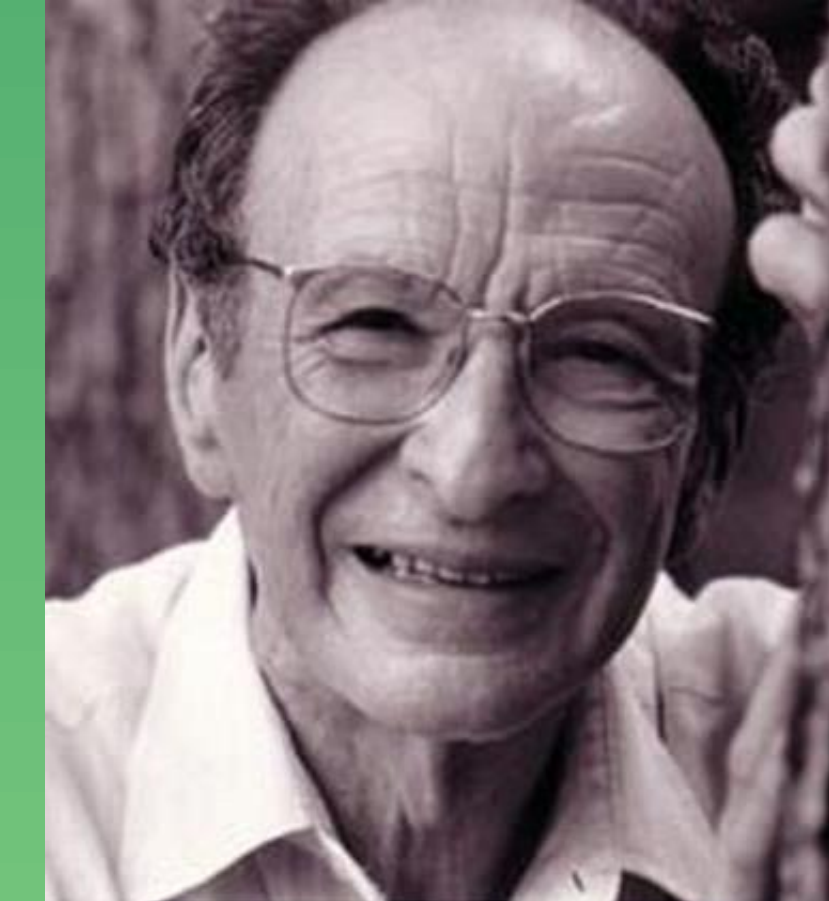
John Dewey (1859-1952)
Even before the constructivist theories of Piaget and Vygotsky were widely known, Dewey was talking about how children learn best when they interacted with their environments and were actively involved with the school curriculum. He rejected much of the prevalent theory of the time - behaviourism - as too simplistic and inadequate to explain complex learning processes. He argued that rather than the child being a passive recipient of knowledge, as was presumed by many educators of the time, children were better served if they took an active part in the process of their own learning. He also placed greater emphasis on the social context of learning. At the turn of the 20th-Century, these were radical ideas. (9)



Maria Montessori (1870-1952)
The Montessori Method is an approach to education which emphasizes individuality and independence in learning. Children are seen as inherently curious and learning driven. Thus, education is viewed as a process which should occur in harmony with the child's individual developmental pace. It is a holistic approach emphasizing all aspects of development, rather than on attaining specific pieces of information. (10)



Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934)
Vygotsky's work was largely unknown to the West until it was published in 1962. Vygotsky's theory is one of the foundations of constructivism. It asserts three major themes regarding social interaction, the more knowledgeable other, and the zone of proximal development.
The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)
The ZPD is the distance between a student's ability to perform a task under adult guidance and/or with peer collaboration and the student's ability solving the problem independently. According to Vygotsky, learning occurred in this zone. Vygotsky focused on the connections between people and the sociocultural context in which they act and interact in shared experiences. According to Vygotsky, humans use tools that develop from a culture, such as speech and writing, to mediate their social environments. Initially children develop these tools to serve solely as social functions, ways to communicate needs. Vygotsky believed that the internalization of these tools led to higher thinking skills. (5)



Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917-2005)
Bronfenbrenner was a Russian-born American psychologist who is most known for his ecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner's research was key in changing the perspective of developmental psychology by calling attention to the large number of environmental and societal influences on child development. (11)

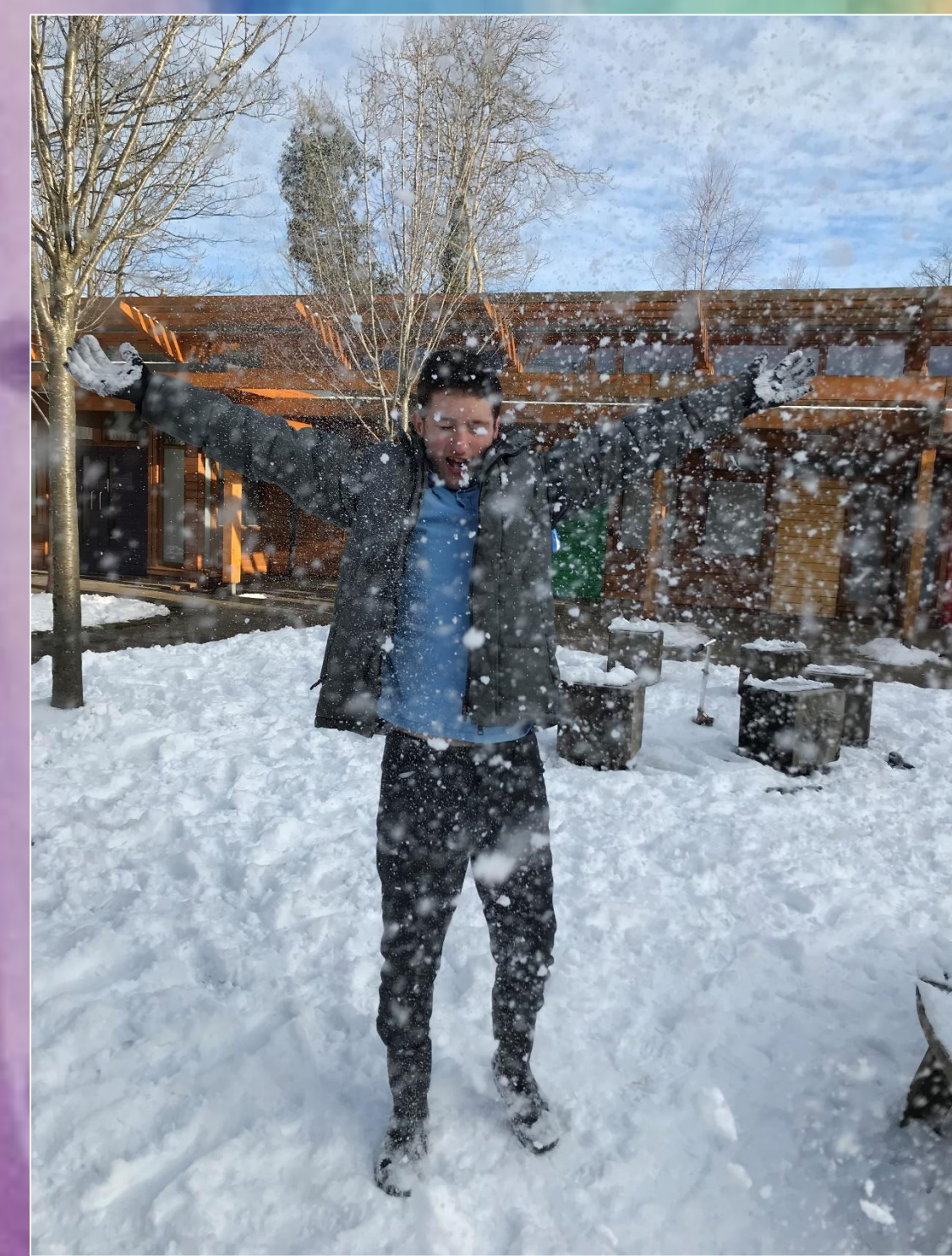
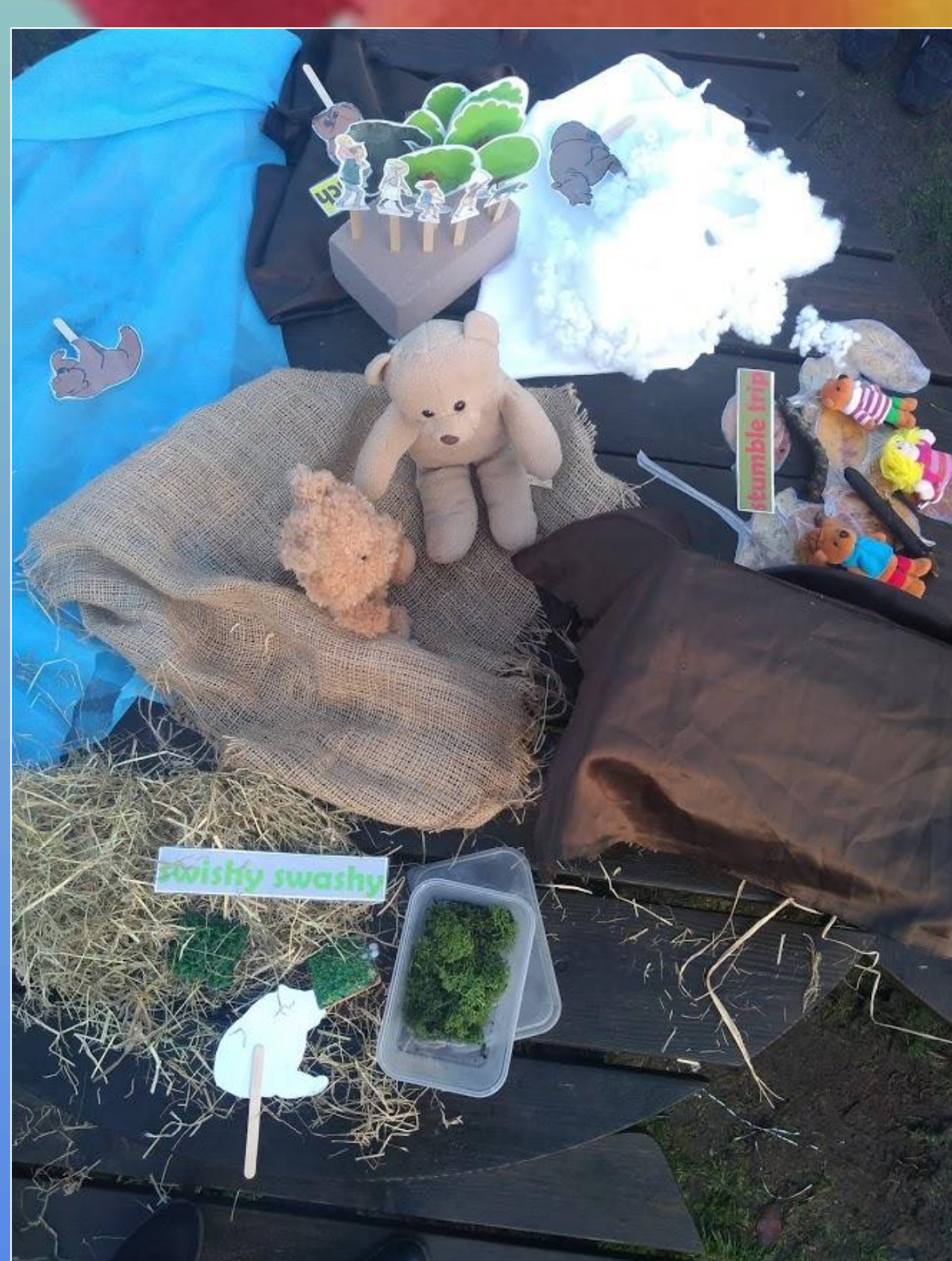
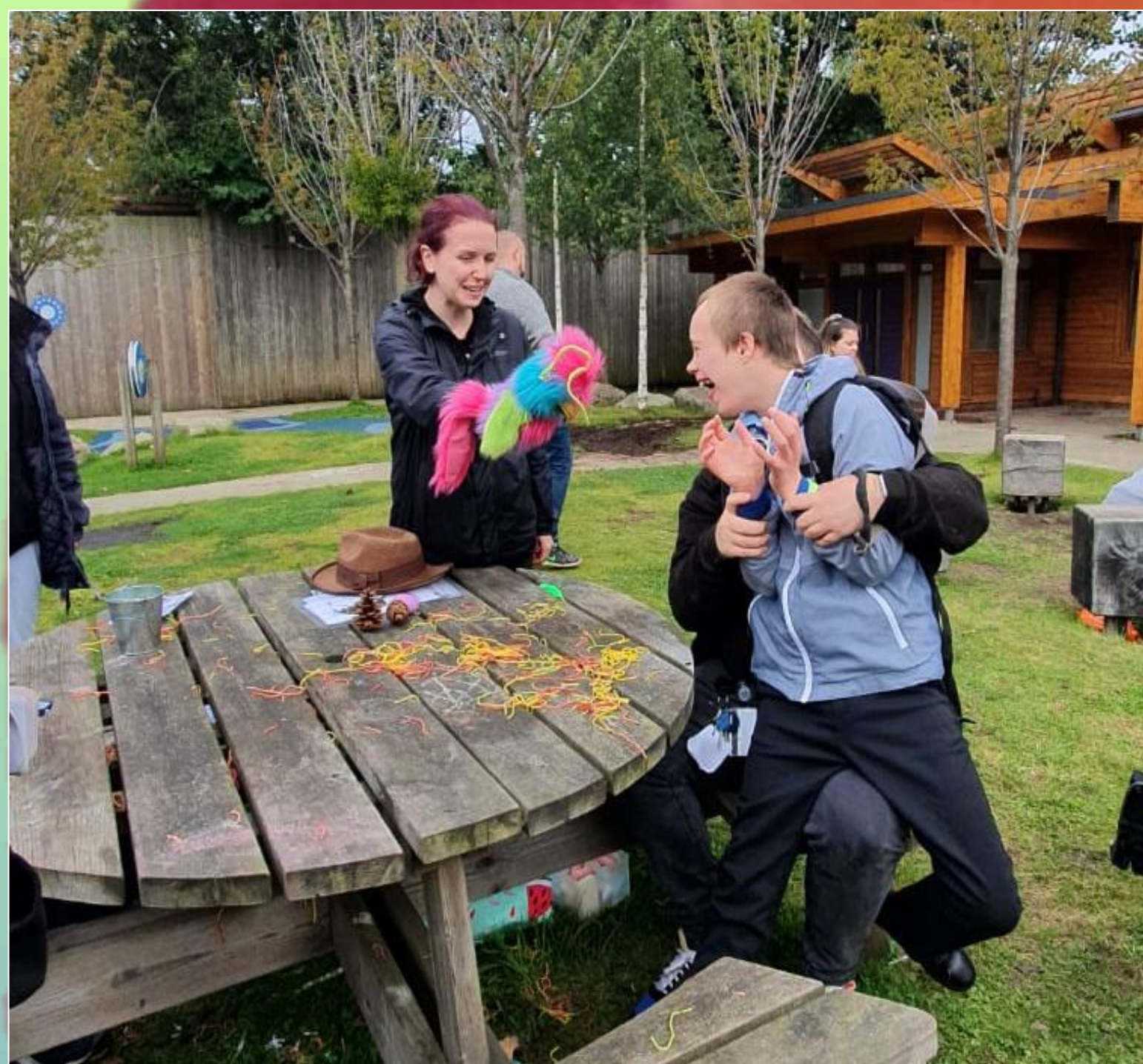
Play is the highest expression of human development in childhood for it alone is the free expression of what is in a child's soul.
Froebel (3)

Play is the work of the child.
Montessori (4)

What a child can do today with assistance, she will be able to do by herself tomorrow.
Vygotsky (5)

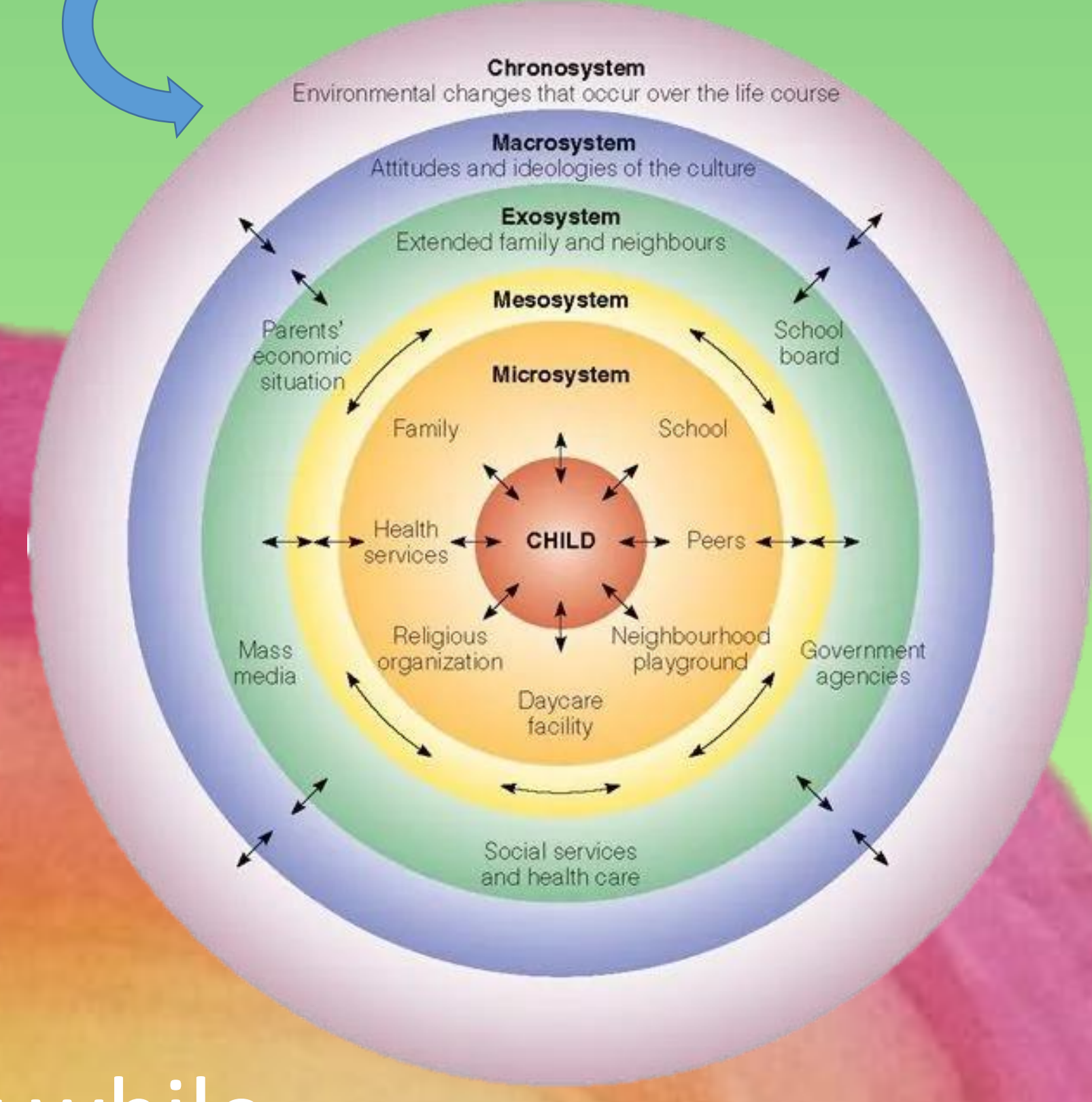
Turning on the television set can turn off the process that transforms children into people... It is primarily through observing, playing, and working with others older and younger than himself that a child discovers both what he can do and who he can become — that he develops both his ability and his identity.
Bronfenbrenner (6)

Below top to bottom: Teachers plan for outdoor play sessions with drama specialist Sophie, Sophie and Alexander play with some puppets and wiggly worms, Nathan plays keek a boo in a hammock at Forest School, learners enjoying a sensory retelling of We're Going on a Bear Hunt, and water play in the School Garden and Harris Garden.



Above from top to bottom: Richard loves really messy play, Willow Class enjoyed a Science game based on Jurassic Park, Jay enjoys dancing in the snow, William and Tim play Big Ball, and Marcus celebrated his birthday in style with dress up and a bouncy castle...

Play allows children to use their creativity while developing their imagination, dexterity, and physical, cognitive, and emotional strength. Play is important to healthy brain development. It is through play that children at a very early age engage and interact in the world around them.



References: 1. https://www.isbe.net/Documents_KIDSWebsiteResources/importance_of_Play.pdf 2. The Power of Play for Children and Young People's Positive Mental Health Supporting Children and Young People's Wellbeing through the Covid-19 Crisis, May 2020, Play Scotland Research Briefing 3. <https://www.froebel.org.uk/about-us/the-power-of-play> 4. <https://montessori-ami.org/resource-library/quotes/childs-work> 5. Vygotsky, L., 1978, Mind in Society, Harvard University Press 6. Bronfenbrenner, U., 1970, Two Worlds of Childhood: US and USSR, Russell Sage Foundation 7. Bruhlmeier, A., 2010, Head, Heart and Hand; Education in the Spirit of Pestalozzi, Sophia Books 8. <https://www.early-education.org.uk/about-froebel> 9. <https://www.pbs.org/onlyateacher/john.html> 10. Montessori, M., 1964, The Montessori Method, Schocken Books inc. 11. Bronfenbrenner, U., 1979, The Ecology of Human Development, Harvard University Press 12. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/Bronfenbrenner.html>