



Now We Are Six Transcript

Timecode	Speaker	Title	Transcription
00:00	Matilda	4.5 years old girl	I am Matilda. In 30 sleeps I am going to go to school.
01:16	Willie French	Head Teacher, Haddington Primary	This is the first time in the history of Scotland that there has been a debate in the Scottish Parliament about the school starting age.
	Beatrice Wishart	Lib Dem MSP, Shetland Islands	<p>Motion 24252: It would be a big change, and I understand why some people are nervous about it. Scotland's school starting age has been with us since 1870; it is deeply ingrained in our culture, habits and expectations.</p> <p>It's not about putting off learning until children reach Primary 3. Attending school would still be mandatory. It is about transforming how children learn in what is currently P1 and P2.</p>

	Julia Whitaker	Author and Play Specialist	<p>There is a school of thought that the sooner children start formal learning: literacy, numeracy, testing different abilities, the quicker they will progress through the curriculum; and that it would be to their advantage.</p> <p>Actually, the evidence says completely the opposite: That children need at least the first 6 to 8 years to really just find themselves. That is the time that they are growing into their bodies.</p> <p>So they need a lot of physical play, a lot of freedom to be outside, in nature, doing what comes naturally to them. And that is not wasting time; that's giving them time.</p>
	Sue Palmer	Upstart Chair, Editor 'Play is the Way'	<p>12% of the world start school before the age of 6; and the overwhelming majority of those are ex Members of the British Empire, due to the fact that back in the 1860's, the Government was deciding when to introduce state education; and they went with 4 or 5 not because of any educational reasons, but because they had to get children off the streets - because their mothers had to go to work in the mills and the mines and factories.</p> <p>Totally economic; not educational or child welfare reasons at all.</p>
	Dr Deborah Holt	Director of QA at Moray House	<p>When you talk to teachers they will definitely tell you that there seems to be many more children with poor mental health at the moment than when they started their careers.</p>
	Willie French	Head Teacher, Haddington Primary	<p>If we changed the whole approach to Early Years education, it would have great gains for society and the population in general.</p> <p>The hope would be that children would have a greater appreciation for the outdoors. Children would have a greater degree of managing risk.</p>

			<p>They would develop better relationships; an appreciation of things around them; and be far far more aware.</p> <p>The benefits would be that we would have a fairer society, a society that met the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1: Successful learners 2: Confident individuals 3: Responsible Citizens 4: Effective Contributors <p>If we were to manage that through a change in approach in the Early Years, I think that would be very successful.</p>
	Julia Whitaker	Author, Play Specialist	<p>We have known for a long time, for decades, even centuries, that play is important for children’s learning.</p> <p>It is the way they learn about the world, they learn about themselves and how to be in the world.</p> <p>But in more recent times, with the dev in neuroscience and advancements in brain studies, we have learned that play is more fundamental than that because we have learned that play is essential for children health and well being. Probably it is not an understatement to say that it is as important as sleep, and nutrition and connection with nature, not just in childhood but from what happens thereafter.</p>
	Willie French	Head Teacher, Haddington Primary	<p>There is a complete misunderstanding of what play means, in the sense of a ‘play-based approach’. There is a general perception, especially amongst those who are not in the profession, that play is something quite frivolous and unimportant.</p> <p>But I think - there’s a famous quote about ‘<i>play is a child’s work</i>’ – and that is absolutely right.</p>

			<p>And so, you know, a lot of their education and a lot of their learning is through play. Unstructured and structured play; of which there has to be a good balance.</p> <p>But we really have to convince people that play is education. Play is a very very serious part of children's work.</p>
	Julia Whitaker	Author, Play Specialist	<p>Play has been described as a protective shield against adversity. It's only through play that you learn how to deal with risk, negotiation, disagreement and all those sorts of things.</p> <p>So children need to play and to build up attributes of competence, confidence, autonomy and resilience; and they do that through their play - especially through physical play, play in nature, and through creative doing: things that they do with their hands repetitively like craft, art, drama, painting. All those sorts of things have been shown now to really endow children with skills which they need to deal with difficulties later in life.</p>
	Lisa Gordon	Steiner Waldorf Class 1 Teacher	<p>Really, if our goal is for children to become educated and to become creative learners and doers, then it is all the more important that they take the time, that they build and grow their bodies, before they start sitting at a desk, looking at worksheets and writing, without playing as much as they need to.</p> <p>It takes them away from the work that they cannot go back and do later.</p> <p>They have to do this in these Early Years: building their brain, building their organs, building their bodies; integrating all their senses, so that when they come and actually are ready for desk work, they are not still struggling with distractions and difficulties and inability to be still and listen and focus; which is really a setback actually... in the bigger picture.</p>

	Willie French	Head Teacher, Haddington Primary	<p>So the Early Level part of Curriculum for Excellence is very much steeped in a play-based approach.</p> <p>Unfortunately, presently there is a great drive in terms of raising attainment and closing the gap.</p> <p>The tension created is that in schools we are concerned at the moment with reaching certain attainment levels by a certain stage.</p> <p>But that doesn't necessarily fit with a developmental approach. Because what is happening is that children are expected to progress in Literacy and Numeracy when developmentally they are not at that stage yet.</p> <p>If we lift the barrier – the attainment barrier - to create and to present a more play-based approach, we certainly think that children would be far more rounded; and would be in a position to acquire literacy and numeracy skills when they are cognitively ready.</p>
	Dr Deborah Holt	Director of QA at Moray House	<p>As soon as you start bringing in tests, you change that child-led, interest-driven, active learning culture and environment into something more measured, that can be stressful for the teachers, and the children and the parents.</p>
	Willie French	Head Teacher, Haddington Primary	<p>The other barriers are that we need to create a big culture change.</p> <p>I think that we need to have everyone buying into it. We need everyone to be fully aware of the benefits of a developmentally age appropriate curriculum; which would not only enhance children learning literacy and numeracy when its age and stage appropriate, but also adding to their health and wellbeing.</p>

	Sue Palmer	Upstart Chair, Editor 'Play is the Way'	The really frustrating thing is that the countries that are doing the best tend to be countries like Finland, Estonia, Switzerland, where children don't start formal education until they are 7.
			<p>The one that really fascinated me at the moment is Ireland, because back in 2008 the Irish introduced a new Early Years curriculum up to the age of 6. Very much like the sort of thing you would see in the Nordic countries: no reading or writing or anything... its all oral language and learning and play.</p> <p>And interestingly, the children who went through that curriculum were the ones who sat the last PISA. And they've shot up the literacy charts.</p> <p>What you do in Early Years pays off!</p>
	Finbar	Steiner Waldorf Class 1 pupil	We still need honey water, as that will be the only thing that'll help it.
	Willie French	Head Teacher, Haddington Primary	<p>I think it would be advantageous if we were to be quite bold and imaginative and to introduce a kindergarten stage, perhaps up to between the age of 6 or 7.</p> <p>What I'd quite like to see; what I think would be beneficial for the children and their development and their learning would be a model that's very similar to nursery, where ages and stages are mixing; where there's freeflow; where there's lots of outdoor sessions. In fact, a predominance of outdoor sessions, out in the fresh air; learning how to self-regulate, developing relationships, and also creating time for children to develop appropriately, to reach a stage where they are actually ready to acquire literacy and numeracy skills.</p>

	Finbar	Steiner Waldorf Class 1 pupil	When I was One, I had just begun. When I was Two, I was nearly new. When I was Three I was hardly me. When I was Four, I was not much more. When I was Five, I was just alive. But now I am Six, I'm as clever as clever, So I think I'll be six now for ever and ever.
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