

Developing an integrated research program for the study of Occupational Science through the lens of play

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BACKGROUND:

P4PLAY is an innovative joint doctoral programme, established in 2020, as a collaboration between 4 academic and 15 partner organisations in Europe and the USA. The overall research goal is to develop new knowledge on the occupation of play and play deprivation; the impact of physical, socio-cultural, and policy environments on play provision; and the development of solutions to address barriers to play provision in diverse community settings. This research responds to the societal challenge of ensuring health, well-being and equality for children (UN Sustainable Goals 3 & 10). Expected outcomes aim to benefit children, families, and communities PhD students are conducting individual projects addressing four fundamental areas with eight study themes.

Occupational Science Courses:

YEAR ONE: Core concepts in Occupational Science: Occupational science seeks to understand how occupations shift in their purpose, performance and meaning as individual, group and collective occupations situated within specific social-cultural and political environments evolve over time. To achieve this understanding topics will include (**but not be limited to**) aspects such as the evolution and development of concepts of occupation, identity, temporality, space, meaning, "othering", culture and social-historical and political context. Each student will be expected to reflect upon, and challenge various concepts related to occupational science from his or her historical and cultural position.

YEAR TWO: Diverse Ways of Thinking: Interdisciplinary Theories and Occupational Science: Occupational Science was developed as an interdisciplinary science which included the intent of integrating knowledge from various disciplines that are consistent with the basic assumptions of the human as an occupational being. Theories about key authors who explore the nature of the social world and occupation in it will be discussed including Foucault, Brunner, Freire, Giddens, DeSousa Santos, Bourdieu, De Certeau and Nussbaum.

YEAR THREE: Occupation as Transformative: Translating Knowledge in Occupational Science: This module aims to enhance students' abilities to translate and promote occupational science for diverse populations. This will be underpinned by an understanding of occupation as a transformative process; the power of occupation for individual and collective change. Knowledge translation will be explored in relation to community, institutional and academic learning contexts. Students will engage in resource development, and actively participate in a range of outreach activities and translate knowledge in an accessible manner to a non-specialist audience. For example, designing an academic module addressing an aspect of occupational science; development and/or delivery of public engagement through exhibits, outreach programmes, school visits, public lectures, social media and websites; and development of policy guidelines.

PHD IN OCCUPATIONAL SCIENCE

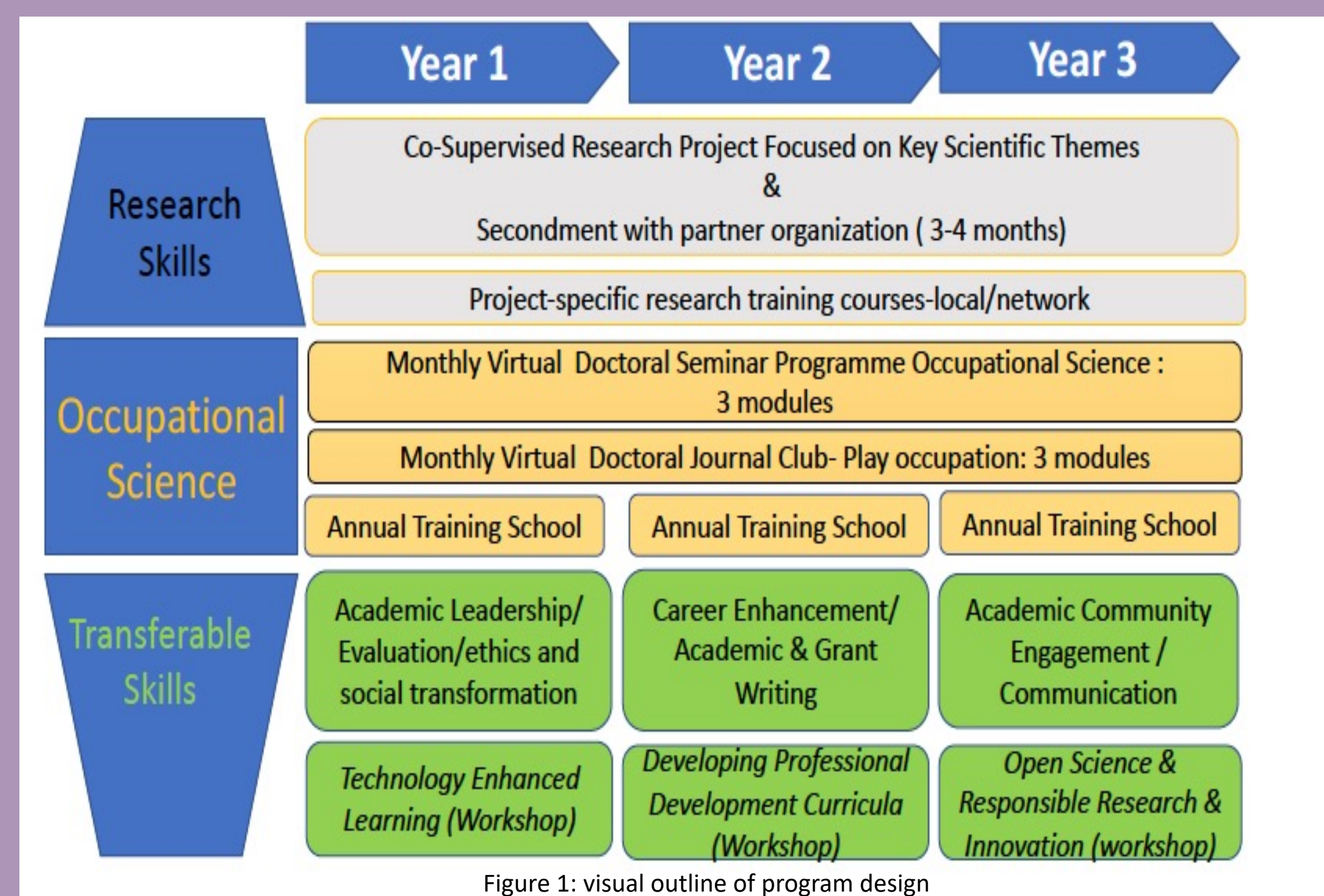


Figure 1: visual outline of program design

Play Occupation Courses

YEAR ONE: Understanding Fundamental Concepts in Play: This module builds knowledge of play from an occupational science perspective. Topics will include (**but not limited to**) play as well-doing; play perspectives from sociology, psychology, rights-based, medical-social model; form, function, meaning of play; gender and play; play and culture across the lifespan; intergenerational play; playspaces, current topics and debates (e.g., technology, risky play; interpretive discourses on play); occupational participation and play. Focus will also be on play research design and methods for researching with children. A child-centred perspective will be embedded in the seminars and research methodology discussions.

YEAR TWO: Contemporary Perspectives on Challenges for Play Occupation: This module examines in more depth, barriers to play. Topics will include (but not limited to) critical analysis of concepts: e.g., 'play deprivation'; children at risk of play deprivation; when environments exclude others from play; policy for play; rights-based issues; societal challenges and impact on health, development and wellbeing. Focus will also be on play research design and methods for researching with children..

YEAR THREE: Translating Knowledge in Play Occupation: This module will be in a seminar series format to present on topics that relate to enabling play from a social transformation framework perspective. Topics will include becoming agents of change, influencing policy, developing skills in advocacy, innovation dissemination and communication. Specific focus will be on developing knowledge in education, translating theory and knowledge and application to future/new contexts.

People:

- Expanding conceptualizations of inclusive play to incorporate the play characteristics of children with diverse play experiences at risk of play deprivation
 - Exploring the barriers and enablers of inclusive play of children at risk of play deprivation in a low resource community
- Exploring the impact of contemporary gender discourses on the play of families with children at risk of play deprivation:
 - To identify diverse ways in which families with children at risk of play deprivation navigate dominant discourses about 'typical play' to construct meaningful/healthy play routines.

Place

- Spatial inclusion: Exploring the relationship between Universal Design and policy for play provision:
 - Analysing inclusion of natural elements in UD for enhancing inclusive play
- Redefining play in technology enhanced play spaces: enhancing children's participation
 - Develop new knowledge of the nature of play occupations in digital spaces

EIGHT PHD STUDY THEMES:



Policy:

- Enhancing spatial inclusion in public playspaces through participatory approaches in planning and design.
 - Develop inclusive approaches in co-creating public playspaces for municipalities, among town planners, landscape architects, and parks management with children of diverse ages, genders, and abilities.
- Applying complexity theory to identify and explore multiple outcomes associated with children's play.
 - Develop and apply a methodology that enables a complex systems perspective on exploring processes associated with facilitating play to identify areas for development

Practice:

- The evaluation of children's outdoor play
 - Determine usable, applicable, valid, and reliable playspace audit assessments & evaluate the cross-regional validity of a playspace audit assessment in Ireland and Switzerland
- Enhancing participation through play interventions in school settings.
 - Examine the potential role of play occupations in advocacy practice within education contexts with migrant children at risk of play deprivation.

Our goal is to progress a rights-based agenda for all children at risk of play deprivation through the development of a child-centred play research programme. A child-centred perspective will be embedded in the seminars and research methodology discussions.

References: 1 Committee on the Rights of the Child (2013). *General comment No. 17 (2013) on the Right of the Child to Rest, Leisure, Play, Recreational Activities, Cultural Life, and the Arts (Article 31)*. Geneva: United Nations.