

Play Futures

Inquiry Ecologies: Designing Play Futures and Thinking in Early Childhood

NOV
2026

Join us for a **transformational four-day retreat** where educators, leaders, and changemakers come together to share, reflect, and reimagine the way we nurture children's connection to their future.



This isn't just any training , it's a **rare opportunity** to dive deep into futurizing pedagogy, surrounded by like-minded professionals, passionate about shaping a better future. Each session is purpose driven for anyone who is ready to put the future at the heart of learning.

**A Four Day
Educational Retreat**



Every child arrives filled with possibility, wired for curiosity, creativity and connection. These capacities are not extras we teach later; they are the very foundations of how human beings learn, adapt and shape the future.

This residential explores a shift away from structured, pre-planned learning experiences towards *living systems of thinking*, where children's ideas are understood as evolving, branching, and interconnected.



Rather than working towards fixed project outcomes, we learn to notice and respond to children's curiosity as it emerges in everyday moments, allowing multiple lines of thinking to develop at once within rich, responsive environments.

Where?

Oak Tree Inn
Balmaha,
Glasgow
G63 0JQ



When?

3rd til 6th
NOV, 2026



Across the four days, participants will explore how imagination, nature, narrative, documentation, and material exploration come together to support deeper, more complex learning.

The residential combines keynote thinking, immersive workshops, reflective practice, and applied pedagogical design.

Workshops include (but many more!)

You Are Standing on a Story

Reclaiming the educator as thinker, leader and change-maker

This opening session reframes early childhood education as an intellectual and creative practice. Rather than implementing systems, educators are invited to recognise themselves as active thinkers shaping meaning, culture, and learning.



Beasts, Myths and Wild Stories

How imagination supports emotional health and resilience

We explore how children use dragons, superheroes, dinosaurs and fantasy play to process emotion, explore power, and rehearse identity.

Focus:

- Imaginative play as emotional thinking . Myth and symbolic storytelling . Power, fear, and moral exploration in play. Creating safe spaces for deep narrative play



Mother Nature, Our Ancestor

Raising guardians of the planet

This session explores belonging, responsibility, and identity in relation to the natural world, not as a resource, but as ancestry and future.



Focus:

- Nature as belonging, not backdrop. Children as future stewards of place. Ethical responsibility in early years practice. Designing a “Guardians of the Planet” approach



Healthier & Happier Little Humans

The science of nature and wellbeing

We explore how everyday contact with nature supports physical, emotional, and cognitive development.

Focus:

- Movement, immunity and physical wellbeing. Emotional regulation and calm . Attention, focus and creativity. Nature as daily pedagogy



Giant Thoughts, Simple Materials

Big thinking through natures treasures

We explore how simple materials, water, soil, sand, sticks and stone can generate complex thinking.

Focus:

- Open-ended materials as thinking tools. Curiosity, experimentation and exploration. Designing for big questions through simple resources. Nature as provocateur of inquiry

Inquiry Ecologies

Designing living systems of thinking

This session brings together the thinking of the residential and translates it into practice.

We explore how children's curiosity can be followed over time, across spaces, materials, stories, and experiences, forming interconnected systems of thinking rather than fixed projects.

We will use the **night sky as a thinking landscape**:

- looking up at darkness and wondering what is beyond it
- stars as points of fascination, pattern, and connection
- space, planets, and "what cannot be seen" as provocations for thinking
- children's questions about night, sleep, dreams, and the unknown



Capturing Thinking Through Photography

Seeing children's learning differently

Photography with children, allowing them to document their thinking, is explored as a way of noticing thinking in motion, not just recording outcomes.

Focus:

- Photography as observation
- Capturing process over product
- Making thinking visible over time
- Using images to deepen reflection



Why do we run Educational Retreats?? What are the benefits?

Our educational retreats offer a unique opportunity for focused learning and personal growth in a more immersive and relaxed environment.



Focused Learning in a Distraction-Free Environment

This setting will allow you to immerse yourself deeply in the subject matter, leading to better retention and understanding.

Networking and Collaboration

We will bring together like-minded individuals who have a shared interest. This will create a rich environment for collaboration, sharing ideas, and learning from others' experiences.

Enhanced Creativity and Critical Thinking

We will encourage you to think outside the box in your nature play approach, considering it from different angles. The relaxed, open atmosphere will foster your creative juices for a deeper level of engagement.



Personal Growth and Reflection

There will be time for you to reflect, mull over and fully consider how you can take the ideas, principles and philosophies forward for you, the team and of course the children.

Interdisciplinary Learning

Our retreats combine various forms of learning, teaching sessions, hands-on activities, nature walks, group discussion, allowing participants to absorb knowledge in a multi-faceted way.



Inspiration and Motivation

Being surrounded by passionate individuals, knowledgeable speakers, and a fresh environment will provide a significant boost to your enthusiasm and motivation to learn.

Access to Experts and Mentors

Our range of guest speakers, trainers and mentors who are experts in their fields give you direct access to these experts for learning, guidance, and inspiration.



Balanced Approach to Learning

The combination of structured learning, free time, shared reflections and experiential activities offers a balanced way to absorb information while also maintaining mental clarity and energy.

Please note that places are limited, we only have space for 18 delegates to attend.

The cost is £1,500 per person, plus vat.

This will include 3 nights luxury accommodation (own room), bed, amazing breakfast, lunches and dinners.



Only
£1,500 plus VAT

Not
increased
for 3 years!

For more information

Email

info@alicesharp.co.uk

Call

0141 557 1666

You will leave this course with a 'tool box' fit for any learning situation. You will be a much more informed Early Years Professional, as well as having a broad range of new knowledge, skills and engagement techniques.

Each delegate will leave with a range of power points, learning stories, workshop prompt cards, research papers, articles, environment and resource photo cards, learning and teaching postcards and a reading list.

These can then be used to cascade to whole staff teams or to deliver training.