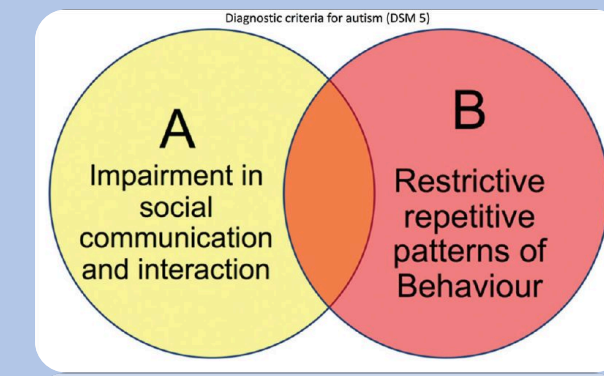




## Introduction:

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) have difficulty in engaging with play compared to their neurotypical peers due to their dyad of impairments (Wong and Kasari, 2012).



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This does not necessarily indicate that they don't enjoy play or that they don't want to play (Delaney, 2009). Educators should provide quality play provision as children with ASD are just as entitled to play experiences as their fellow students (MacCormack, 2020; O'Sullivan et al, 2018).

The consistency and quality of play for children with ASD is not clear from the current literature with the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) expressing concerns about provision of play for children with ASD in educational settings (NCSE, 2016).

## Research Aims & Objectives

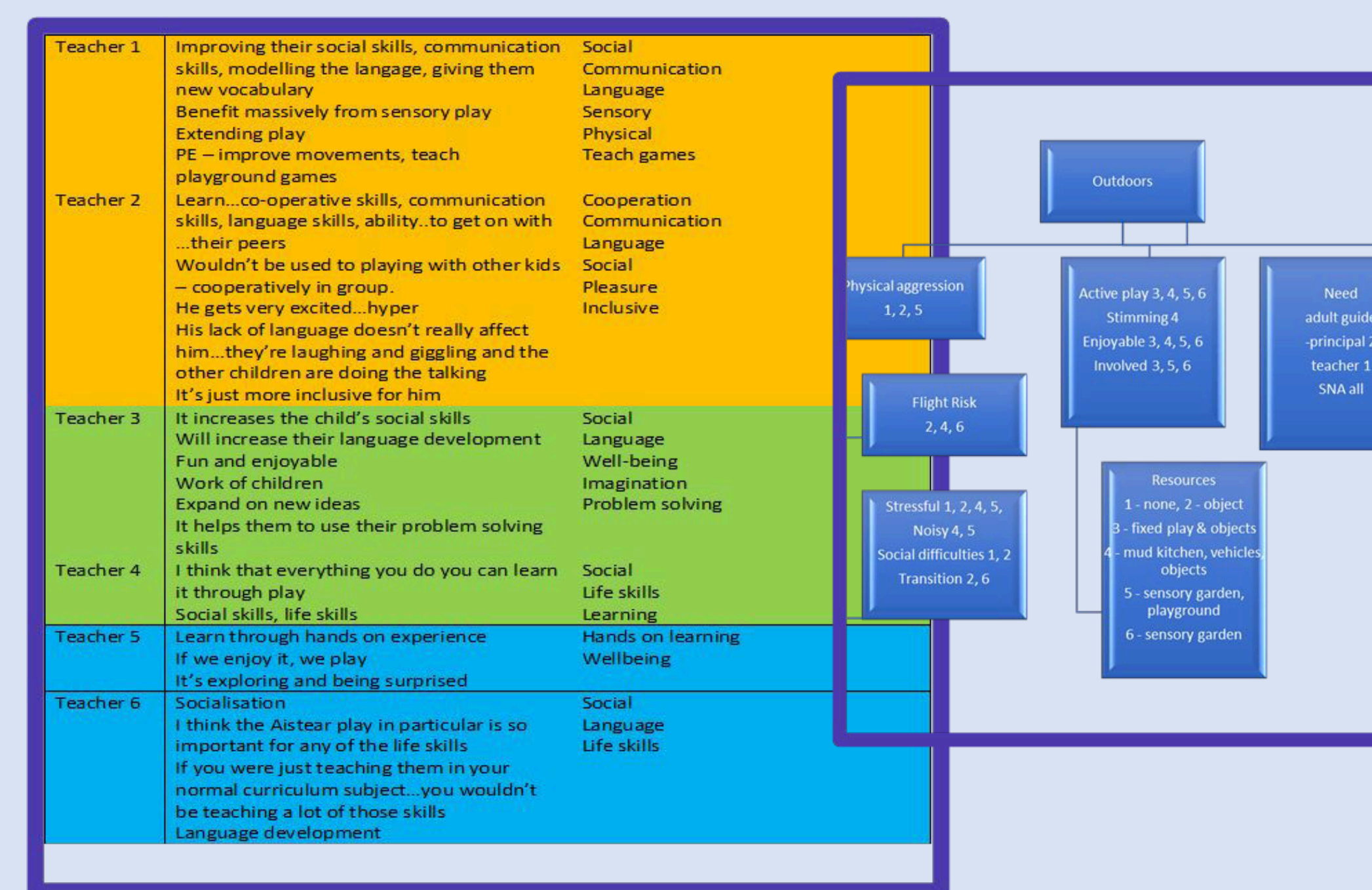
### Examine:

- Play and Autism in mainstream schools, special classes for ASD and special schools – students with ASD under 7 years old
- Levels of Well-being and Involvement during play
- How is play supported in the outdoor environment
- Who supports students during play
- The benefits of Aistear (Early Childhood Curriculum Framework) and Síolta (National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education) for teachers and students in supporting play

## Methodology: Qualitative Research Design

- **Semi-structured interviews**
- **Narrative Inquiry & grounded theory concept** (Ford, 2020; Strauss & Corbin, 1994).
- **Purposeful sampling:** six teachers - two from each educational setting
- **Online interviews**
- **Ethical considerations:**
- **Thematic analysis** (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).
- **Comparative analysis** (Esser & Vliegthart, 2017)

## Coding: Colour-coded comparative table and thematic matrix



## Discussion: Key findings

### Theme 1: Outdoor Play

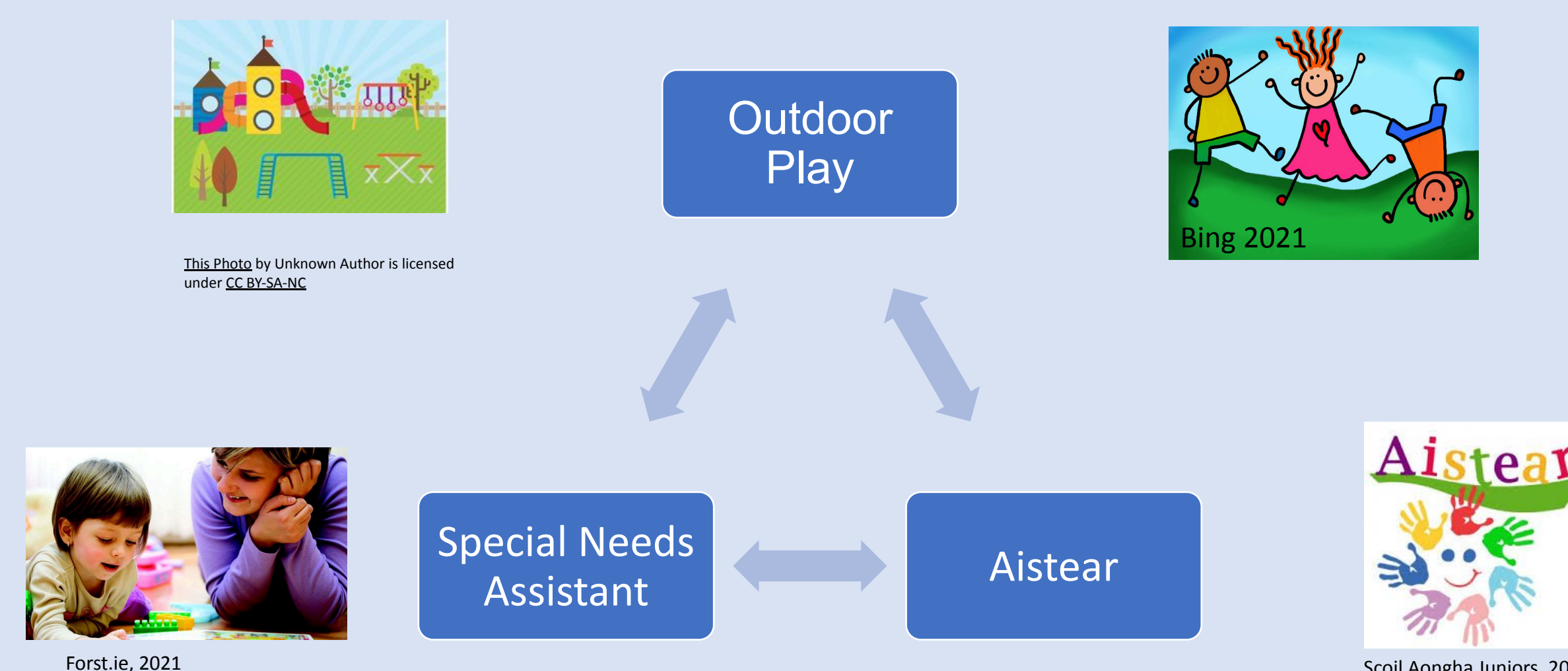
- Outdoor play = "free time"
- Only 2 schools had playgrounds
- Adult supervision needed for student safety
- Unique challenges due to ASD traits
- Students in mainstream most distressed outdoors

### Theme 2: The Role of the SNA in Supporting Play

- "Integral to play"
- Playful, supportive, model behaviours
- Helps keep play safe and regulated
- Supports indoor and outdoor play

### Theme 3: Aistear as a Means to Play

- Promotes skills development
- High Well-being & Involvement = choice of play
- Low Well-being & Involvement = outdoors & adult-led play
- Seen as play strategy
- Síolta not implemented by teachers, n = 6



## Implications for Practice

### Schools

Review outdoor play environment  
Assess Wellbeing & Involvement levels

Sensory profile assessment  
Varied play resources to suit strengths and needs

### Staff Training

Continuous Professional Development in play & ASD interventions

Examine teaching time to help build relationships with students  
Further research study possible

### Government

Review inspectorate guidelines to include play, Aistear and outdoors & increase visits substantially

Explore amalgamation of pre-school & junior school to one dept. to implement Aistear Síolta



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