

THE PLAYWORK MENU



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1. introduction / about the project

"The real act of discovery is not in finding new lands, but in seeing with new eyes."

~ Marcel Proust,
French author

1.1 Project overview

Meynell Games invites you to participate in this innovative project which is aimed at playwork practitioners across the counties of Hampshire and West Sussex.

We intend to visit every setting which delivers playwork in these counties and our team of qualified and highly experienced playworkers will be offering advice and guidance based on observations of those settings. Our observations will be based on a sound and up-to-date knowledge of current playwork and play theories.

When we visit your setting, we will invite playworkers, setting managers and owners/committee members onto our mobile training vehicle. There you will be able to:

- (i) participate in an interactive programme that identifies what play and playwork are and the real and immediate benefits to the setting of the staff undertaking nationally recognised playwork training;
- (ii) receive positive observation feedback based on the area of the playwork menu which has been previously chosen by the setting;
- (iii) take advantage of a library of playwork books, journals, resources etc (loaned with a freepost return envelope);
- (iv) have answers and resources provided to support any current issues.

1.2 Aims

The project aims are as follows:

- (i) to increase the awareness of play in a playwork context;
- (ii) to support access to playwork training;
- (iii) to support the improvement of the quality of playwork provision and thereby the outcomes of Ofsted inspections;
- (iv) to enhance children's lives and opportunities;
- (v) to reach 'hard to reach' parts of the playwork sector across the counties.

"Creative play is like a spring that bubbles up from deep within a child."

~ Joan Almon

1.3 The playwork menu

The literature you are currently reading has been written with two intentions in mind: firstly, that it serves as an introduction to some theoretical and practical ideas in the playwork field and secondly, that it forms what we term the 'the playwork menu'. That is to say, after having read this literature, treat it as you would any other menu: choose which of the five areas on it you would like the Meynell Games team to observe, advise and guide you and your colleagues on when we visit your setting.

1.4 Methodology of the menu

The menu is divided into five areas:

- play props and environments;
- the playwork principles;
- the play cycle;
- play types;
- risk in play.

"Play is a feeling."

~ Brenda Crowe

Each of the five areas is further divided into sub-sections and a summary of what we will observe.

1.5 What happens after the team have left the setting?

It should be noted that once the Meynell Games team have physically left the site of your setting, this is by no means the end of the process regarding your potential learning and access to support.

You will have undertaken on-site training and development based on our observations for one aspect of the playwork menu. There will be reference material on this subject area on the project

vehicle and this will be made available to you.

Following our visit, you will receive feedback notes which will record our positive observations of your setting.

You will also be given the opportunity to conduct an evaluation of our work with you.

Meynell Games offers a range of further playwork training courses which can be delivered in your area. These courses include the CACHE Level 2 Award/Certificate in Playwork (A/CPW), the CACHE Level 3 Award/Certificate/Diploma in Playwork (A/C/DPW) and the CACHE Level 3 Award in Playwork for Early Years and Child Care Workers (APEYCW). There is also a range of playwork short courses available. All of these courses will cover many aspects of playwork detailed in the playwork menu.

After we have left your setting, we trust you will be suitably inspired

and enthused to re-read the rest of the playwork menu and look up and access reference material for these other areas.

We have written a selection of optional exercises. The opportunity now arises for you to complete these exercises in your own time. Please feel free to photocopy the blank exercise sheets which we will send to you and distribute them to your colleagues. You may be able to use them as reflective tools in an on-going process of development for your setting.

In your individual or team reflections, get into the habit of working on how your setting can continuously develop and be made even better. Write these ideas down.

You may wish to show these ideas to your local Hampshire CDW (Childcare Development Worker) or West Sussex CSC (Childcare Support Co-Ordinator). Your CDW/CSC will be able to offer on-going support and advice. Meynell Games is also in on-going professional contact with all of your county's CDW/CSCs. We can also offer them support and guidance and take note of their knowledge and expertise.

Please feel free to contact Meynell Games staff after we have left your setting. We can offer advice, guidance and support.

In summary, the project vehicle's visit to your setting is only the start of the process. Your learning is in your own hands and we aim to support you in your personal and professional self-development journey. Play is so important in the lives of children. With you, we aim to fulfil our aims of helping to create better play opportunities for all children and young people.

"Play involves some active engagement on the part of the player."

~ Catherine Garvey 1991

I.6 An introduction to play and playwork

"Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world."

~ Albert Einstein

What is play?

Play is something a child will do wherever and whenever it is possible. Play will take place in all aspects of a child's daily routine whether eating, walking, talking, travelling, shopping or in the classroom.

Play is a child's tool for discovery and exploration of likes, dislikes and skills; an outlet for acknowledging and coping with their experiences and developing concepts and opinions of the world around them. Play is how children find out about themselves and the people and world around them.

Play can be fun, serious, cruel, painful, loud, quiet, energetic, calm, intense, fickle, intelligent, scientific, silly, creative, inquisitive, safe, familiar, risky, dangerous, destructive, physical, cheeky, rude, emotional, frustrating and satisfying. Every child has a different way of playing which is individual and personal to their self and their own needs, interests and experience. Without access to rich and varied opportunities for play children may suffer and their healthy development may be seriously effected. They may suffer socially, physically, intellectually, creatively and emotionally. They may become unnecessarily violent, complain a lot and lack humour, resilience and flexibility. Whilst adults might study and find reasons and/or benefits for play, we must remember that play is important for its own sake.

What is playwork?

Playwork is something that takes place wherever adults set up and

facilitate a space where children go to play.

Playwork is underpinned by the Playwork Principles and the job function is laid out in the National Occupational Standards that come from years of observation, reflective practice, research and consultation.

Playwork is about facilitating and enriching opportunities for all children to play. This is incredibly important in today's society where children have increasingly fewer opportunities to be in control of what they do.

Playwork is about observing how children use different bits and pieces and identifying the play value of these things in order to maintain and continue to facilitate the play process.

Playwork accepts that the child at play is the centre of the process. This means that sometimes we may not understand or even like what's going on in a child's play; it's up to the playworker to acknowledge their own responses and not let them 'control' what the child chooses to do. Playwork requires the playworker to be present within the play space but not in an interfering or dominating way; they should be keenly observant in order to respond to a child's play cues where necessary. It is important for the playworker to be 'playful' in their response to a child's invitation to play; to enable the play process/cycle to continue.

Playworkers need to be aware of all relevant legislation and respond to its requirements in a way that maintains the child's rights and access to opportunities for play; remaining true to the Playwork Principles of the playwork profession and not 'giving in' to conflicting adult agendas.

"Here is Edward Bear,
coming downstairs now,
bump, bump, bump, on
the back of his head,
behind Christopher
Robin. It is, as far as he
knows, the only way of
coming downstairs, but
sometimes he feels that
there really is another
way, if only he could stop
bumping for a minute and
think of it."

~ AA Milne

1.7 Summary

We trust you will find this literature as informative and stimulating to read as it was for us to research and to write. We very much look forward to working with you to further develop and promote the importance of play. Our contact details are listed below for you to arrange for the project team to visit you and your setting.

1.8 Contact details

Joel Seath:
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1.9 Academic notes

The author would like to draw your attention to the fact that, if a small raised number appears in the text of this menu, for example ², then this relates to the book, journal or website where the information was originally found. You can find a list of these books etc in section 4.

Where there is an 'a' or a 'b' after a publication date in this section, this indicates that there was more than one book used with the same year and the same author.

2. brief bios on project staff

Note: Project team members are listed alphabetically after Meynell. Each team member has contributed their own biography.

2.1 Meynell

Meynell is the director of Meynell Games: an organisation committed to creating better play opportunities. Meynell has been working with children and young people for over 38 years. He is a playworker, playwork trainer and author and has worked in nearly every type of setting imaginable as well as working with children and young people in countries across three continents. Meynell is still a playworker and can be found at the Ocklynge after school club and playscheme, the Fairlight after school club or around the country taking large scale games sessions with parachutes, balls and rings to events, festivals and gatherings.

It is well known that Meynell has 'strong' opinions, but however provokingly he expresses himself you can be sure he is passionate about playwork and providing support for creating and enabling opportunities for children and young people to experience the full range of play forms.

"When I examine myself and my methods of thought, I come to the conclusion that the gift of fantasy has meant more to me than my talent for absorbing positive knowledge."

~ Albert Einstein

2.2 Jason

"Now I see the secret of making the best persons - it is to grow in the open air and to eat and sleep with the earth."

~ Walt Whitman

Jason started his career in childcare in January 2001, registering as a childminder. Whilst childminding children after school he developed a very good relationship with the school staff, teachers and Headmaster and, in January 2002, was asked to open a school holiday club.

Jason has completed a CACHE Level 2 in Playwork (2005) and the Level 3 Diploma in Playwork (2006).

In April 2005, he opened his first after school club and two further holiday clubs. The after school club and one of the holiday clubs were opened in an area of deprivation. Working with the local community was paramount in the success

of these clubs.

In managing the clubs Jason has built up a very good relationship with all the children, parents and staff enabling them to communicate with him freely. He considers himself to be a good role model and engages the children in many play experiences, bringing his ideas and knowledge to the clubs. Jason believes in a child-led environment allowing the children freedom to choose and facilitate their own play.

Jason has been involved in setting up the very first National Playday event in Worthing, West Sussex. He is currently undertaking the Foundation Degree in Playwork at Brighton University.

Jason is the Senior Play Ranger for Arun District Council working to facilitate play in parks, open spaces and local schools.

2.3 Joel

Joel is a qualified playworker who first started working with children in 1991 as a volunteer in a Saturday morning club. His experience with children and young people encompasses after school clubs, holiday playschemes, summer camps, play days, youth clubs, crèches, nurseries and festivals. He has run a play setting in Portsmouth and also worked in Bournemouth, Marburg (Germany) and various locations around Hampshire and West Sussex. He works for the Meynell Games Group on the Hampshire and West Sussex Mobile Playwork Education and Training Project and is also a current and active playworker in an after school and holiday club in Chichester, working with children two days per week.

"I want people to know that in every life, there are storms. But we must remember to play after every storm and to celebrate the gift of life as we have it, or else life becomes a task, rather than a gift. We must always listen to the song in our heart, and share that song with others."

~ Mattie Stepanek
(Spoken at age 11)

Joel has also undertaken various other roles within the children's services field including: independent playwork trainer, consultant, quality assurance mentor and assessor, Early Years and Playwork NVQ Assessor and Out of School Club Development Officer. Joel is particularly interested in working with children on big art projects and has been asked to facilitate several art workshops over the years. He is also engaged and stimulated by research into playwork theory.

2.4 Mia

Mia is a qualified playworker who has worked in a wide variety of play settings. She started off volunteering for Bristol Playbus Project in 1999, after going to the 'Big Bus Bash' event where double-decker buses came together to show off their play interiors. Mia thought it would be fun and loved working on the bus. She went on to run sessions, on and off the bus, working with traveller children in many areas of deprivation in Bristol (as a play ranger in parks and school playgrounds, parent and under 5s groups, after school clubs and youth music projects).

Mia has also worked in many after school clubs, holiday playschemes, crèches, adventure playgrounds, camps, play pods and youth clubs in Bristol and Brighton. She has also facilitated creative and scrap workshops for playworkers.

As well as now working for the Meynell Games Group as part of the MPETP team, Mia set up her own arts company, Creative Kids, in 2004 (she won the Innovation Award with a fellow student at the University of Brighton). This allowed them to set up and run workshops with an interactive Ultra Violet sensory den and other creative workshops. Mia has a passion for the arts and loves being creative with children at festivals, play settings, schools and community events all over the country.

In 2008, Mia and a friend set up Creative Kids International to build a link between children in Zambia, Africa with children in the UK through the visual arts. Creative Kids International is working in partnership with Barefeet Theatre, a Zambian organisation who work with vulnerable street children. Mia returned from a 6 month trip to Zambia in March 2009 and is continuing the project of supporting and engaging children in positive creative experiences in both the UK and Zambia.

2.5 Pete

Pete has been working as part of the Meynell Games team since March 2007 and has been involved in a variety of projects such as the development of the mobile training provision which has been operating since early 2008.

Pete is a playworker who has a decade or so of experience working alongside children and young people in a variety of play settings.

In addition to his work on the mobile training project (currently operating in Hampshire and West Sussex), Pete works at Ocklynge play setting in Eastbourne and Fairlight after school club in Brighton.

Pete is also a playwork trainer and has largely been responsible for designing and delivering several one day short training courses provided by Meynell Games. The titles of these courses include: *Physical play and games*, *Rain doesn't need to be a pain*, *Outdoor games*, *Creating play environments*, *Cultural and playground games*, *Outdoor cooking workshops*, *Making music in the forest* and *Risk and challenge in play*.

3. the menu

3.1 Play props and environments

3.1.1 What we will be observing for this aspect of the menu

"I like nonsense, it wakes up the brain cells. Fantasy is a necessary ingredient in living; it's a way of looking at life through the wrong end of a telescope. Which is what I do, and that enables you to laugh at life's realities."

~ Theodor Geisel,
'Dr. Seuss'

We will take note of and provide feedback on:

- Your feelings on, and experience of, the play space (reflective practice);
- Children's opportunities for various indoor, outdoor and split level play;
- Sensory stimulation and how this helps to create an 'affective play space';
- Permanent, transient, physical and affective play spaces;
- How the space is changed by staff or how it could be changed;
- How the theories of loose parts and compound flexibility are or can be put into practice;
- The various use of objects (play value);
- The potential for play ranging;
- The risk inherent in the children's play and the potential for their further exploration of this;
- The human resources available to children.

3.1.2 The IMEE model of reflective practice

See section 3.5.2 for details (page 49).

3.1.3 Play spaces

Indoors, outdoors, split level and sensory environments; permanent, transient, physical and affective play spaces.

Links to playwork literature

Hughes writes about what he terms the playwork curriculum. He states that: 'Play needs a varied environment to be effective [containing] opportunities to access solitude, height, games with formal/informal rules, slopes, gorges with/without bridges etc.'¹

"Anyone can fly.
All you need is
somewhere to go
so that you can't
get there any
other way. The
next thing you
know, you're flying
among the stars."

~ Faith Ringold,
Tar Beach

How varied an environment is your play setting?

Play tends to happen where children happen. Children can be extremely inventive given the opportunity. We, as playworkers, should be providing and adapting or modifying environments, so that play can flourish.

Hughes explains: 'Play spaces are artificial spaces. And, although the children who use them will significantly change them [themselves], in a [greater] sense, they are constructed by playworkers. In order to ensure that when children use them they are able to control what they do, it is essential that much of the 'behind the scenes' work is done when children are not actually present. This process of preparation is known as 'environmental modification' and . . . it is about changing or modifying the play space in ways that will attract children and stimulate their play drive.'²

Discussion

"When the artist is alive in any person, whatever their work, they become an inventive, searching, daring, self-expressive creature."

~ Robert Henri

It can sometimes be difficult to take note of how the children at play settings are using their space because there is so much going on at once. Are you fully aware of how children like to play in their spaces and why they need to play in these ways? For example, spaces such as: a garden; on open fields; on fixed and moveable play structures; in enclosed outdoor spaces; on hard courts; in enclosed areas which the children have created themselves; under and on furniture; in wooded areas; up trees; in bushes; in the use of hills and slopes; areas where there are walls to climb on; on railings and fences; in walk-in cupboards; in corridors; in book corners; in

hall spaces; in foyers and other reception areas; in rooms which adults don't think are play spaces . . . (what else can you think of?)

Children, in short, being resourceful and opportunistic creatures, tend to have the ability to play in places which adults might not see as play places at all.

How do you modify spaces so that children can play?

Links to playwork literature

'The play setting should stimulate the senses. Music, foods, perfumes, colours and views, and different textures do that.'³

Hughes adds that we, as playworkers, should 'rise to the . . . challenge and ensure that the setting facilitates exploration and experimentation.'³

Discussion

List as many aspects of sensory stimulation in your setting as you can. You may have a herb garden for smell and touch; other plants such as roses; the opportunity to taste and test different foods; wind chimes; water features; room fans; air conditioning units; textured craft materials; dressing up clothes; CD players; karaoke machines; lava lamps; candles; a variety of colour; murals; a variety of wall, floor and furniture surfaces; sand play; clay; mud; access to elements such as snow, wind, rain; access to trees and woodland in Autumn etc.

"We cannot set aside an hour for discussion with our children and hope that it will be a time of deep encounter. The special moments of intimacy are more likely to happen while baking a cake together, or playing hide and seek, or just sitting in the waiting room of the orthodontist."

~ Neil Kurshan

All of these aspects help to create what is known as an 'affective play space'. That is to say, a space which helps to stimulate the senses and the emotions.

Children need to experience lots of different spaces because they benefit from stimulation. If there are props in a permanent space (one which stays the same) then children can create their own temporary play areas within these spaces (transient spaces). The physical environment and the affective environment (the mood or atmosphere) both contribute to the stimulation of the child.

3.1.4 The theories of loose parts and compound flexibility

Links to playwork literature

In 1971, the landscape architect, Simon Nicholson published an article in the journal, *Landscape Architecture Quarterly* entitled: 'How not to cheat children: the theory of loose parts'. In this article, he wrote:

"We do not see things as they are. We see them as we are."

~ Talmudic Proverb

'In any environment, both the degree of inventiveness and creativity, and the possibility of discovery, are directly proportional to the number and kind of variables in it.'⁴

Discussion

That is to say, the more bits and pieces and stuff there is in an environment, the greater the potential for exploration and creativity. Observe children at play and see how they move objects around sometimes for no other reason than they might look or 'feel' better being in their new location; watch how children play with mud or sand and bits and pieces left laying around; see what happens if you leave a pile of cardboard boxes in the middle of the room.

However, the theory of loose parts should not be seen simply as all about the stuff, the bits and pieces laying around. It is also about the environment and how children use it and the stuff they find within it:

See how fences and garden furniture and swingball poles become the frame to lay some netting over, the creation of a lair. Watch what happens to the garden space if you leave a crate of chalks out there: paving slabs can become canvases, brick walls present textured drawing opportunities, wooden fences can end up with multi-coloured slats. See the way sand pies might develop out of play where children have found a vessel to carry water from the toilet tap to the sand pit in . . . (what else can you think of?)

The theory of loose parts must include the bits and pieces in the play space and the actual play space itself. The more bits and pieces in a space, the more flexible, and therefore rich, it will be.

Links to playwork literature

Linked to the theory of loose parts is the theory known as compound flexibility.

Brown⁵ quotes Maslow⁶ in defining a child's developmental process as being towards 'self-realisation'. He further adds:

'The playworker should . . . be concerned with enriching the child's play environment in order to stimulate the process of development through play. There are a number of factors playworkers should take into account when considering how best to create such an environment . . . the most important [being] compound flexibility – the interrelationship between a flexible/adaptable environment and the gradual development of flexibility/adaptability in the child'⁷

"The difference between the artist and the non-artist is that the artist never stops playing."

~ Alex Mozart

Discussion

That is to say, the more flexible and changeable the environment is, the more the child is able to be flexible and adapt to new situations and new ideas and to solve problems on their own.

For example, a child loses a ping pong ball behind a cupboard and can't reach it with his hand. He looks around at the bits and pieces left laying around in the room. He fetches a hockey stick and pokes that under the cupboard to reach the ball. He has solved the problem because there was something available for him to experiment with.

By doing things for themselves, by having an environment which allows for this to happen, by experimentation and exploration, children will

"As astronauts and space travelers children puzzle over the future; as dinosaurs and princesses they unearth the past. As weather reporters and restaurant workers they make sense of reality; as monsters and gremlins they make sense of the unreal."

~ Gretchen Owocki

start to take control of what happens in their environment. They will gain confidence and self-awareness and try more things for themselves. They will see more possibilities within the environment. The environment will become even more flexible and adaptable because of this. And so the spiral continues. Of course the opposite spiral is also possible: the less flexible an environment, the slower the development of a child's self-confidence and so a subsequent unflexible environment.

3.1.5 The play value of objects

Links to playwork literature

Conway⁸ tells the story of how, upon meeting the owner of a play equipment company, he admitted to him that he'd copied one of their product ideas and built it on his adventure playground, rather than buy the product itself. Rather than suing him, the company owner, Conway explains, was excited about what had happened and went on to question him about what various other uses the children had got out of what had been built.

Discussion

This example serves to illustrate the point that children can find many more uses for play objects than was originally intended (or, as in the case above, uses for structures such as a swing construction). Children can also make use of an object for play where no original play intention (or only one particular play intention) was designed into it. Consider the following:

Children use a large, circular barrel container to roll each other around

the room in; foam ended croquet sticks become guns, crutches, swords, motorbikes and horses; large sheets and flags are equally useful as ceilings or walls for dens, as hammocks slung between trees, as the 30 feet long tails of sea creatures who run around the field; skipping ropes can be reins or prisons or snakes or laser wire gates . . .

Why should climbing frames only be climbed upon? They can be hung from, used as hide-outs, used as the basis for extensions, turned into spaceships and branches for monkeys.

Why should a tennis racket only be used for hitting a tennis ball? It can be a guitar or a zapper or a frying pan or a face guard to stop you from being zapped.

Why should the beanbags stay in the quiet area? They can become a bridge under which live trolls; they can form a pond, the court in which sits a giant frog king; they can be thrown or used as a means of attack or defence in rough and tumble play.

Many objects, on the face of it, serve only a certain purpose. However, in an environment which promotes a variety of play (embracing the theories of loose parts and compound flexibility), where anything can happen because children are given the permission to experiment and explore, then the richer that environment.

The play value of an object will be increased if it can be used in several different ways. It follows, therefore, that the play value of an object will also increase if children are allowed to use it in different ways.

"Play has
been man's
most useful
preoccupation."

~ Frank Caplan

3.1.6 Play ranging

Links to playwork literature

Hughes defines play ranging as: ‘journeying to places outside of one’s immediate area of experience.’⁹

Discussion

That is to say, children need to physically explore areas around and outside their immediate environment; they need to do this in order to understand and develop their own ideas about the space they’re in and how others interact within it; they need to see things for themselves.

“We are never more fully alive, more completely ourselves, or more deeply engrossed in anything than when we are playing.”

~ Charles Schaefer

If children are only experiencing areas or people within those areas in certain given ways, they risk forming narrow-minded ideas.

Consider children playing out on a sports field. They are told not to go past the trees at the far end because that is too far. The children, therefore, only know what they’ve been told. They are told it’s too far, so it’s too far. But too far for what? If ‘too far’ is not experienced by the children, how do they really know for themselves?

Hughes goes on to give the extreme example that a lack of play ranging can have. He details research work undertaken on adults who were children in Belfast during the Sectarian ‘Troubles’ dating back to the 1970s. The work indicates that the majority of those interviewed described restricted movements due to Sectarian attacks and the fear of those attacks. In presenting the concept of ranging, Hughes explains that it is a vital aspect of play behaviour and that a lack of it could hold back development in some way.⁹

To conclude on the subject of ranging, Hughes¹⁰ quotes Moore¹¹: 'Every child needs equal access to opportunities for asserting his or her individuality through interactions with the environment.'

3.1.7 Risk in play

See also section 3.5, page 48.

Discussion

Many adults (and that includes playworkers) can be seen to be risk averse, unwilling to let go of the idea that children should be protected from risk at all costs. We live in a society of potential blame and litigation and often feel we have a duty of care towards the children. However, we as playworkers are not the children's parents. Our purpose, amongst other things, is to provide stimulating and challenging environments and that includes the opportunity for risk (physical and emotional).

We are not, however, in the business of being negligent, of taking inadequate precautions, of overlooking the hazardous content of play environments.

Risk and hazard are not the same thing.

Hughes¹² writes about the idea of graduated risk-taking, i.e. appropriate to the child's abilities. When we have ensured that the play environment is free of unacceptable hazards, children should be given the opportunity to develop their own risk-management skills.

"Live and work
but do not
forget to play,
to have fun in
life and really
enjoy it."

~ Eileen Caddy

Links to playwork literature

"Play is the
exultation
of the
possible."

~ Martin
Buber

'Children can only learn to risk assess and avoid unnecessary risks if they know what risk is and have some experience of it.'¹³

'Risk is a fundamental part of the process of human development.'¹⁴

Hughes states: 'Risk is something children recognise. They are aware or conscious of it. It is something they know they are entering into, like consciously climbing higher, swinging faster or balancing more precariously.'¹⁵ He goes on to suggest that 'lessons can be learnt'¹⁵ for future life from risky play as children.

3.1.8 Playworkers and children as human resources

Discussion

Apart from the physical resources you might have in your setting's store cupboard (sports equipment, art materials, various toys etc) and the fact that the space and furniture themselves are resources, the playworker can be seen as very much of a resource too.

You find and fetch equipment at the children's request but you also act as a sounding board for children's ideas, responding to their play cues (see section 3.3, *The play cycle*); you might spark the play by way of an idea given to the children; you may be involved in the joint development of play ideas with a child; you could be asked to be a referee. Similarly, children can be a human resource for each other: they can act as mediators; the developer of rules of engagement in games; the narrator in a play scenario or in a theatrical piece; a scorer; a ball boy or ball girl . . .

Links to playwork literature

Sturrock and Else¹⁶ propose various ways a playworker should work in a play setting, depending on the situation. In their 'intervention hierarchy' it is suggested that playworkers will be called upon to perform, playfully and with integrity, any of the following: observation of the play; fetching equipment for the children; responding to children's 'cues' to be involved in play; 'witnessing' that play as an adult whilst engaging at the child's level; complex involvement in the play at the child's invitation.

"We don't stop playing because we grow old, we grow old because we stop playing."

~ George Bernard Shaw

3.2 The playwork principles

3.2.1 What we will be observing for this aspect of the menu

We will take note of and provide feedback on:

- Your feelings on, and experience of, the play space (reflective practice);
- Where, when, how and why the children play; what with and with whom;
- Playworkers' support of children's play;
- Playworkers being keenly observant of children's play;
- The practice, attitudes, actions in anticipation, reactions to situations and interactions of playworkers in support of children's play;
- Any reflective practice in evidence;
- How playworkers put children's rights to play first and foremost;
- Playworkers being effective advocates for children's play when engaging with adult-led agendas.

3.2.2 The IMEE model of reflective practice

See section 3.5.2 for details (page 49).

3.2.3 Where did the current playwork principles come from?

Links to playwork literature

The Playwork Principles are a set of eight statements which guide playwork practice. They developed from the older Assumptions and Values for Playwork. The SkillsActive website for playwork states:

‘The Assumptions and Values for Playwork were developed during the drafting of the Playwork National Vocational Qualifications

in the early 1990s. During the 2002 review of the National Occupational Standards for Playwork at Level 2, the need to revise them was identified . . .’¹⁷

There had been ‘identified tensions between the philosophy that informs The First Claim and the Playwork Assumptions and Values.’¹⁷

In 2002 a review and consultation on the Playwork Assumptions and Values took place.

‘Experienced playworkers and playwork trainers from across the UK [met to] evaluate and revise [the information].

‘The Playwork Principles were endorsed by SkillsActive in 2004 and have been incorporated into the Playwork National Occupational Standards to replace the Assumptions and Values.’¹⁷

“Without this playing with fantasy no creative work has ever yet come to birth. The debt we owe to the play of imagination is incalculable.”

~ Carl Gustav Jung

3.2.4 What are the playwork principles?

Discussion

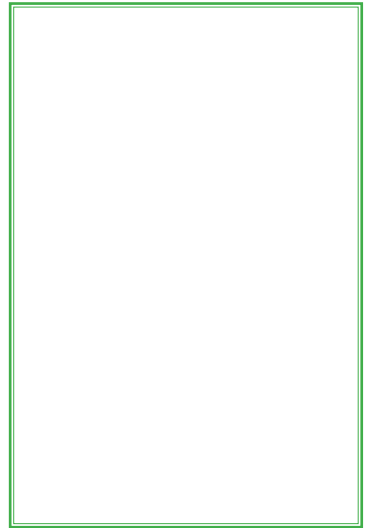
1. All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate. Play is a biological, psychological and social necessity, and is fundamental to the healthy development and well being of individuals and communities.

That is to say, children play because it's something they do naturally. Play is important for physical health, mental well-being and the development of relationships (and also for the 'here and now'). Individuals and groups of individuals benefit from play. It is how a child naturally interacts with the world and other people.

2. Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons.

Play is something children choose to do. It comes from within them and happens because of what they want to do and not because of what others want them to do. The content of the play is what the child chooses to do and the intent is why they do it, i.e. it's not what the adults are directing them to do.

3. The prime focus and essence of playwork is to support and facilitate the play process and this should inform the development of play policy, strategy, training and education.



"Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did. So throw off the bowlines, sail away from the safe harbour. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream."
~ Mark Twain

Playwork is mainly about making sure that play can happen. It's about recognising that there's a process when children play that we shouldn't interfere with. To a playworker the play is the most important thing. Everything a playworker does is in order to make sure the play takes place without interference. We should be supporting play, providing resources, responding appropriately to children etc. This idea should help with communicating the message about the importance of play to other people.

4. For playworkers, the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas.

For playworkers, the fact that the children are playing and the feelings, emotions and experiences children have in their play come first. Playworkers explain the importance of play in discussions with other adults (play for its own sake not for a purpose).

5. The role of the playworker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play.

In making sure that children can play, playworkers can support certain areas to be used. Playworkers attempt to create and adapt environments in which play can happen. They also provide resources for the children who are making their own play space. A good playwork team will encourage a culture of independence with the children and an 'anything is possible here' environment.

When playworkers use the term children, they mean all children and young people across the age range, with a range of abilities or specific play support needs, children from a broad range of backgrounds, lifestyles and

upbringing and geographical locations. It is an inclusive term.

6. The playworker's response to children and young people playing is based on a sound up to date knowledge of the play process, and reflective practice.

Playworkers observe children at play. As they identify the feelings, emotions and experiences children may be having then they will take action based on what they see.

It is a professional responsibility for us, as playworkers, to maintain our own continuous professional development (CPD). We should read books and journals, keep abreast of current developments in playwork and attend training courses and conferences where possible. We should be continuously reflecting on and discussing our own practice.

The world is constantly changing, as are children's play needs. In response, playworkers need to be aware of this: it is a job where we need to remain constantly open-minded and prepared to learn from the children, keeping up to date with changes of national guidelines.

7. Playworkers recognise their own impact on the play space and also the impact of children and young people's play on the playworker.

Playworkers know that, just by being in a play space themselves, this can affect what and how the children play. Playworkers also know that children's emotions and feelings and play behaviour can affect them on an emotional level and should be mindful that these feelings can affect their judgement. Playworkers are aware that how they act in that play space

"Play is the beginning of knowledge."

~ George Dorsey

can have a hugely positive or negative impact on the children at play.

"Sitting up a tree on your own and looking out - you feel big inside like nothing can knock you down ever again."

~ Child

We need to acknowledge how we are feeling as we enter the play setting and be aware of how certain dynamics in relationships or situations may affect our responses to the children. We also need to be honest if finding a child's behaviour challenging and use our team as support and an opportunity to discuss this.

8. Playworkers choose an intervention style that enables children and young people to extend their play. All playworker intervention must balance risk with the developmental benefit and well being of children.

Playworkers know a variety of reasons why play should take place. They also know different ways of interacting with children and choose the best method to suit the situation, ensuring that the play isn't restricted in any way, supporting them in the development of their play ideas.

We, as adults, support children to 'extend' their play by us not stopping it. (The word 'extend' is not about developmental goals; it is about children's play content). We as adults may not always understand or like what we see in a child's play but it is not our right to stop it.

We need to be aware of the play cycle and our role within this, recognising our urge to adulterate or take over. We also play a sensitive role within the play frame when interacting and sparking play – there are some children who will need positive interaction from a playworker in order to explore their play needs.

A culture where children are able to take calculated risks in an

environment free from unacceptable hazards is a good one and cannot be seen as gross negligence. The playworker recognises that risky play is an essential aspect of children's play and considers what the child is gaining from the play in terms of physical, emotional, social, creative or intellectual benefits when making decisions about how, or if, they should intervene.

3.2.5 How do the principles relate to observations on children's play?

Discussion

Playwork Principles 1 and 2 explain that children are naturally driven to play by something inside them (in just the same way as they're driven to breathe); play is what they choose to do, not what we, as adults, choose for them to do.

As playworkers, we should be monitoring our play settings to determine whether children have the opportunity to play in the ways they want to play. Children's quality of play (in what are termed to be compensatory play spaces) often depends upon where they play, what with, with whom, when, how and why.

By observing children's play we can learn a great deal about the where, what, who, when, how and why of their play. From what we learn, we can identify what we, as playworkers, need to do to support even better play opportunities (before and during the children's attendance).

We need to be keenly observant of children's play and support it by not stopping it.

"Surely
all God's
people...like
to play."

~John Muir

"Normal play behaviour was virtually absent throughout the lives of highly violent, anti-social men."

~ Stuart Brown

3.2.6 How do the principles relate to observations on how adults work within children's play environments?

Discussion

Playwork Principles 3, 5, 6, 7 and 8 identify methods of working: facilitation and support, observation, reflective practice, understanding of emotional affects on children (and vice versa) and appropriate intervention styles in children's use of spaces and resources and interactions with each other.

As playworkers, as well as monitoring our play settings, we should also be monitoring our own practice, attitudes, actions in anticipation, reactions to situations and interactions. We should be the best we possibly can be but we should work with integrity and honesty.

By identifying our strengths and challenges, we can reflect on what is needed to provide children with better play opportunities.

We need to discuss, observe children and colleagues, be open-minded and acknowledge children's rights to play (where, what with, who with, when, how and why) as the core of our work.

3.2.7 How do the principles relate to how adults work when children are not around?

Discussion

Playwork Principle 4 sets us the challenge to put children's rights to play first and foremost when we discuss the subject matter with other

adults. Adult-led agendas can hinder children's play in all manner of ways: certain adults may not like where children play; they might not like what they play with; they might see it as inappropriate when children play at certain times; adults might not like how children play and, indeed, might not see children's actions as play at all. Other adults might ask playworkers to control the children's play or quieten or settle them down a little.

By defending the children's rights to play with informed knowledge and a passionate belief, we as playworkers, can help children have access to better play opportunities.

In order to do this, we need to be keenly observant of children's play, reflective in our practice, educated in current ideas on play and playwork and ready to commit to the importance of children's play.

3.3 The play cycle

3.3.1 What we will be observing for this aspect of the menu

We will take note of and provide feedback on:

- Your feelings on, and experience of, the play space (reflective practice);
- Observed examples of aspects of the play cycle (with and without playworkers' involvement);
- Interactions between children and between children and playworkers.

"People don't stop playing because they grow old, they grow old because they stop playing."

~ George Bernard Shaw

3.3.2 The IMEE model of reflective practice

See section 3.5.2 for details (page 49).

3.3.3 What is the play cycle?

Links to playwork literature

‘Children play as it is in their nature to do so.’¹⁸

Research and analysis undertaken by Gordon Sturrock and Perry Else resulted in publication of the Colorado Paper (1998). The main points of this work are also posted online at their Ludemos website and, within it, they describe what they term as Psycholudics: ‘The study of

the mind and psyche at play, [the description of] the process of play as it happens.’¹⁸

They elaborate by going on to say: ‘We are driven to play as part of our basic human development. This play drive is just as much a part of us as the urge to breathe’.

A psycholudic approach to playwork, they explain, necessitates an understanding of the various components that make up the play process, the process of playing. These components are known as the play cycle.

Discussion

We suggest the six main components to be as listed below:

“Play gives children a chance to practice what they are learning.”

~Fred Rogers

Metalude

The thinking process before the visible signs of play can be observed. The metalude, in essence, is the idea of play developing in the mind. The initial stage of the cycle of play.

Play cue

The child's invitation to play. This can be issued to people, animals, objects or other aspects of the environment and is an action which is a direct result of the contemplative state that is the metalude.

Play return

The response the child may get from issuing a play cue. This could be from other people, animals, objects or the immediate environment.

Play frame

As a result of play cues and returns, there then develops a boundary which frames the play. This could be a physical boundary such as mats on the floor or a non-physical, imaginary boundary such as a theme to a game or a length of time. The frame 'keeps the play intact.'¹⁸

Play flow

The progression and development of the child's play. This is the central part of the play cycle. Once the frames have been established there is the possibility for the play to become extended, engrossing and involving. The play flow can last for short or long periods of time.

Annihilation

When the play frame has lost its meaning for the child, when that particular segment of play has broken down and the play flow has stopped, it is said that the play is annihilated.

"Play involves testing our limits physically and socially."

~ Steven Chown - Playlinks

3.3.4 How can we make use of the play cycle?

"If the doctor looks down a child's throat or carried out some small operation on him, we may be quite sure that these frightening experiences will be the subject of the next game."

~ Sigmund Freud

Links to playwork literature

Given that, as human beings, we are driven to play (the play drive), it follows that we need places to play in. In the Colorado Paper, Sturrock and Else state that: 'The natural space for play (both physical and psychic) is steadily being eroded . . . is being curtailed or contaminated.'¹⁹

They go on to explain: 'We see increasing signs of breakdown and dis-ease [regarding natural, as opposed to created, play spaces]. In response, playsites are coming to serve as 'authorised' grounds for

children's play.'¹⁹

Increasingly, these playsites are being staffed by adults. Playworkers. Sturrock and Else suggest that, on these sites, and because of a desire to ascertain what the children's play might mean, playworkers are moving into the realm of therapeutic playwork, of performing a curative function. Play spaces, they state, should be seen as therapeutic spaces. They have potentially healing properties.

Sturrock suggests that: 'Much of analysis . . . and 'healing' practices of a whole range of therapies is . . . [essentially] play-based . . . It is in play that the potential to heal psychic ills lies . . . [therefore] the playworker is inevitably involved in a form of healing practice.'²⁰

Discussion

How does a playworker perform the role of a healer? Consider the main components of the play cycle: metalude, play cue, play return,

play frame, play flow, annihilation.
Consider the following:

‘Children play as it is in their nature to do so. Adults can enhance play opportunities by sensitively interacting with children and by establishing stimulating play environments.’¹⁸

It can be seen that, by sensitive involvement and engagement with children, playworkers can help to heal the psychic ills some children may be experiencing: they can respond to play cues which might otherwise have been ignored (causing the child, potentially, to become more and more agitated and to descend into what is termed dys-play: perceived as over-aggressive and destructive behaviour); they can provide props so that internalised ideas formed in the metalude period can be expressed in the external world; they can interact, subtly, in the metalude space itself . . .

Furthermore, Sturrock and Else²¹ state that playwork practice may require playworkers to be sensitive to the fact that children can get lost in their play and that playworkers ‘feel’ these periods in which children are engaged. It is this mutual engagement, or centring, which, they say, is the source of all curative, therapeutic outcomes in the psychoanalytical field.

In other words, playworkers could be seen to be in a position of undertaking a therapeutic role if they are centred and focused on the child’s condition (play) and when they are in tune with this. From this position, they are able to undertake healing tasks.

To conclude, Sturrock and Else state: ‘If almost all psychologies of

“Play is
children’s
work”

~ Anon

"Deep meaning lies often in childish play."

~Johann Friedrich von Schiller

depth, or therapies are . . . the 're-playing' of neurosis formed in childhood, we might argue that the playworker is active at the precise point where potential neuroses are being formed.²²

That is to say, the future psychic ills of children may well be in our hands.

3.4 Play Types

3.4.1 What we will be observing for this aspect of the menu

We will take note of and provide feedback on:

- Your feelings on, and experience of, the play space (reflective practice);
- Observed examples of the sixteen currently recognised play types.

3.4.2 The IMEE model of reflective practice

See section 3.5.2 for details (page 49).

3.4.3 What are play types?

Links to playwork literature

'Play types is the term we use to describe the different visible behaviours we observe when children are playing.'²³

Research, observation and analysis undertaken by Bob Hughes for Playlink (formerly the London Adventure Playground Association) resulted in the publication titled *A playworker's taxonomy of play types*.

Discussion

In this publication (and also in later work), Hughes speculated that play types provide an insight into childrens' states of mind and physical well-being. Play types can be seen in the way children behave and interact.

It is recognised that as playwork theory and practice advances, more play types may well be observed and debated. This process is already underway: Hughes initially recognised fifteen singular play types which he later expanded to sixteen.

In using the term singular play types, he suggests that types of play behaviour can fit into sixteen clearly defined but broad categories. However, anyone who has observed children at play will recognise that spotting any one type of play in isolation is difficult. Hughes advanced his ideas by suggesting the theory of amalgamated play types. In other words, several play types can seem to join together or happen at once.

"I am a part of all
that I have met;
yet all experience is
an arch
wherethrough
gleams that
untravelled world
whose margin fades
for ever and for
ever when I move."

~ Ulysses, Tennyson

3.4.4 Why do we need play types?

Links to playwork literature

Many theorists such as Piaget, Vygotsky, Sutton-Smith, Hall, Smilansky and Hutt and Hutt have all undertaken studies on the subject of play. Hughes'²⁴ own work suggests that play performs a vital function in the evolutionary development of the child. That is to say, children adapt by means of play. Not only this, he proposes, but play also tells children that they have to adapt.

Discussion

"It is requisite for the relaxation of the mind that we make use, from time to time, of playful deeds and jokes."

~ Thomas Aquinas

Hughes recognises that the word 'play' is a broad term which encompasses many forms. It's a big thing. The term 'play types' breaks 'play' down into parts. These parts are necessary because we, as playwork professionals, need to be aware of, and provide, the full range of play options in order for children to evolve, as Hughes would have it.

If children are denied engagement with certain play types then that aspect of their evolutionary development may suffer as a result. For example, children who are denied the opportunity to take part in rough and tumble play may not develop a full understanding of physical interactions with other people (e.g. what effect

different types of touch is likely to produce; what is acceptable and what is not acceptable regarding physical contact in social situations).

Hughes also explains that, what he calls play deprivation, has been 'predicted as a precursor to non-social and antisocial traits of behaviour in children.'²⁵ In other words, children who don't take part in certain types of play may develop certain traits; they may be play deprived in some way.

Therefore, it can be seen that play types are needed to define what children are doing and what they're not doing. This will then inform us about what other play options we may need to be offering, in addition to what the children can already access.

3.4.5 What are the sixteen currently recognised play types?

Communication Play

Language play; non-verbal play in the use of body language, facial and body gestures, posture; the spoken and written word; communication by pictures. The use of words and non-verbal interactions in experimentations, rhythms, beats, tones, jokes, songs, poems, insults, screams, laughs, made up sounds. Communication is about words, pictures, gestures, sounds and actions and can be seen in interactions with other humans, with animals or with inanimate objects.

"Play is the highest form of research."

~Albert Einstein

Creative Play

Creative processes (not necessarily just about the end product) involving various media such as paint, chalk, charcoal, pens, pencils, collage, glue, glitter, clay, playdough, plastercine, sand, mud, earth, card, scrap, fabric; and actions such as dancing, making music, mime, construction, storytelling.

Deep Play

'Occurs when children 'up the anti' (not necessarily consciously) into areas of real physical, psychological or psychic risk . . . [Hughes suggests] it could be an evolved mechanism for exploring the nature of mortality and death.'²⁶

Dramatic Play

Play which involves the relation of narratives such as in the enactment of stories, plays, improvised scenes and scenes re-enacted from television, films, theatre etc.

Exploratory Play

Play in the wider environment with bits and pieces in the model of loose parts. Examining how things work, what things do, how things fit together, what can be done with certain items.

Fantasy Play

Play where the imaginative elements are made-up worlds, objects, characters and powers, e.g. magical kingdoms of elves and pixies.

Imaginative Play

Play where the imaginative elements are grounded in real life objects and scenarios but in unusual manifestations, e.g. underwater cars.

Locomotor Play

The use of gross motor skills in: balance, speed, direction, jumping, skipping, dancing, spinning, climbing.

Mastery Play

The manipulation of aspects of nature, e.g. digging holes, damming streams, fire play.

Object Play

Problem solving play, investigating the tactile properties and the novel use of a variety of objects (including live objects) and relationships.

Recapitulative Play

The playing through of previous evolutionary stages: animal (engagement with nature's elements); savage (species interaction); nomad (play ranging); pastoral (mastery of the environment); tribal (social hierarchies, gangs, rituals). Includes play such as: fire play, den building, weapons play. The sum total of 'human evolutionary history, stored and passed on through our genes.'²⁷

Role Play

The acting out of and experimentation with identity. Use of dressing up clothes, masks, hats and costumes, artefacts which identify various jobs, cultures, responsibilities.

Rough and Tumble Play

The testing of strength and comparative physical abilities; the experimentation with touch and understanding of relative pressures; the tactility of humans.

Social Play

Interactions with other people; play with rules or protocols.

Socio-Dramatic Play

Dramatic play with links to real life in which participants enact tasks and scenes which sometimes have deeper or more personal content.

"Play keeps us fit physically and mentally."

~Stuart Brown, M.D.

Symbolic Play

"Necessity may be the mother of invention, but play is certainly the father."

~Roger von Oech

Play in which an object is used to stand for something else, e.g. a spoon becomes a person, a circle of foil becomes a wedding ring.

Discussion

In addition to Hughes' sixteen play types (*recapitulative play* was added to the original list of fifteen in the first edition of *A playworker's taxonomy of play types*), from our research and professional discussions and observations, we also suggest the following:

Dark Play

Experimentation and exploration of matter and ideas which might be perceived as dys-play, a term used by Sturrock and Else (1998); that is, destructive or negative in other ways. Dark play examples could include: burning ants with a magnifying glass, pulling wings off of ladybirds, torture play or games involving real or imagined pain or other violence. Dark play: is it play or is it not play?

3.5 Risk in play

3.5.1 What we will be observing for this aspect of the menu

We will take note of and provide feedback on:

- Your feelings on, and experience of, the play space (reflective practice);
- Playworkers' practical awareness of children's needs to engage in risky play;

- Children engaging in graduated risk-taking as a result of the environment and positive playworker attitudes towards risk;
- Practical understanding of the difference between unacceptable hazard and risk;
- Environmental modification by the playworkers so that risky play can be engaged with;
- The varying personal risk-taking (both emotional and physical) of children;
- Examples of good risks being engaged with in the setting;
- Examples of bad risks which are recognised and dealt with by the playworkers;
- Any discussions with playwork staff during the play session regarding risk benefit assessment.

"Children at play are not playing about. Their games should be seen as their most serious minded activity."

~Michel de Montaigne

3.5.2 The IMEE model of reflective practice

Links to playwork literature

'As playworkers are we really doing the best we can?'²⁸

Bonel and Lindon²⁹ describe the reflective practitioner as someone who understands:

'The orientation within playwork, and other areas of work with children and young people, of a willingness to think and discuss, not only focus on actions. Reflection also includes allowing for the perspective of other people within a situation.'

"Man is most nearly himself when he achieves the seriousness of a child at play."

~Heraclitus

The Playwork Principles state that a playworker's prime focus and essence is to 'support and facilitate the play process.'¹⁷

That is to say, making sure that play can happen. In order to do this, the playworker needs to understand play on many different levels and from different perspectives.

Discussion

With all of this in mind, we recommend the use of the IMEE model of reflective practice³⁰ when thinking about play environments. As a result of this, thought on a playworker's own actions should take place.

In short, Hughes suggests that playworkers would benefit from taking a four-step view of their environment:

- (i) Intuition: there is a kind of sixth sense at work when we walk into a play setting. It tells us about the 'feel' of the place, whether it has the potential for quality play opportunities or, when the children are there, the likelihood that any given event might happen;
- (ii) Memory: what are our own childhood experiences of play? Could that potentially happen in this environment?
- (iii) Experience: our previous adult knowledge of quality play environments will help us to make decisions about where we are now;
- (iv) Evidence: by reading and researching playwork literature, we will be able to draw further conclusions about the environment we are in.

In order to create better play opportunities for children we need to consider our own practice if we work in children's play settings. How can your intuition, memory, experience and the playwork evidence help you to do this?

A playworker needs to be keenly observant of children's play; support it; discuss it; study it. A playworker needs to understand play on many different levels and from different perspectives (intuitively, in remembrance of their own play, using their own observations and from the study and observations of others).

3.5.3 Playwork and the purpose of risky play

Discussion

Many adults (and that includes playworkers) can be seen to be risk averse, unwilling to let go of the idea that children should be protected from risk at all costs. We live in a society of potential blame and litigation. However:

Almost any environment contains hazards or sources of harm.³¹

In any human activity, there is an element of risk.³¹

Risky behaviour can happen indoors too. One headteacher pointed out that a pencil in the eye is far more dangerous than a grazed knee, but no-one bans pencils.³²

We often feel we have a duty of care towards the children. However, we as playworkers are not the children's parents. Our purpose,

"Children need the freedom and time to play. Play is not a luxury. Play is a necessity."

~Kay Redfield Jamison

"People tend to forget that play is serious."

~David Hockney

amongst other things, is to provide stimulating and challenging environments and that includes the opportunity for risk (physical and emotional).

We are not, however, in the business of being negligent, of taking inadequate precautions, of overlooking the hazardous content of play environments.

Risk and hazard are not the same thing.

Hughes¹² writes about the idea of graduated risk-taking, i.e. appropriate to the child's abilities. When we have ensured that the play environment is free of unacceptable hazards, children should be given the opportunity to develop their own risk-management skills.

Links to playwork literature

'Children can only learn to risk assess and avoid unnecessary risks if they know what risk is and have some experience of it.'¹³

'Risk is a fundamental part of the process of human development.'¹⁴

Hughes states: 'Risk is something children recognise. They are aware or conscious of it. It is something they know they are entering into, like consciously climbing higher, swinging faster or balancing more precariously.'¹⁵

He goes on to suggest that 'lessons can be learnt'¹⁵ for future life from risky play as children.

3.5.4 Risk in play provisions

Links to playwork literature

Traditional workplace risk management involves identifying and, if necessary, lessening hazards, in order to reduce the risk of an adverse outcome. This is different from play provision. Here, in many instances, the presence of a hazard – for example an unguarded vertical drop, a wobbly bridge – is potentially to be welcomed.³³

Children need and want to take risks when they play. Play provision aims to respond to these needs and wishes by offering children stimulating, challenging environments for exploring and developing their abilities. In doing this, play provision aims to manage the level of risk so that children are not exposed to unacceptable risks of death or serious injury.³¹

However, there is a growing concern about how safety is being addressed in children's play provision. Fear of litigation is leading many play providers to focus on minimalising the risk of injury at the expense of other more fundamental objectives. The effect is to stop children from enjoying a healthy range of play opportunities, limiting their enjoyment and causing potentially damaging consequences for their development.³¹

It is the job of all those responsible for children at play to assess and manage the level of risk, so that children are given the chance to stretch themselves, test and develop their abilities without exposing them to unacceptable risks . . . If we do not . . . then children may be denied the chance to learn these skills.³¹

"To the art of working well a civilized race would add the art of playing well."

~George Santayana

"Play is the only way the highest intelligence of humankind can unfold."

~Joseph Chilton Pearce

One valuable approach to risk management in play provision is to make the risks as apparent as possible to the children. This means designing spaces where the risk of injury arises from hazards that children can readily appreciate (such as heights) and where hazards that children may not appreciate (such as equipment that can trap heads) are absent.³¹

We must realise that:
Safety in play provision is not absolute and cannot be addressed in isolation.³¹

That is to say, there are benefits to risky play too.

3.5.5 The benefits of risky play

Links to playwork literature

All children both need and want to take risks in order to explore limits, venture into new experiences and develop their capabilities . . . Children would never learn to walk, climb stairs or ride a bicycle unless they were strongly motivated to respond to challenges involving a risk of injury.³¹

Any injury is distressing for children and those who care for them, but exposure to the risk of injury, and experience of actual minor injuries, is a universal part of childhood. Such experiences also have a positive role in child development. When children sustain or witness injuries they gain direct experience of the consequences of their actions and choices, and through this an understanding of the extent of their abilities and competencies. However, children deserve protection against fatal or permanently disabling injuries, to a greater degree than adults.³¹

Children have a range of physical competencies and abilities, including a growing ability to assess and manage risk, which adults arguably tend to underestimate.³¹

Gauging risk is a personal business - every child has his or her own capacities. For instance, some children find the thought of walking along the top of a high wall makes them anxious, while others are confident and at ease - some children see risk in saying hello to someone new, or getting their clothes wet. Generally children are competent at judging their own capacities and capabilities, they push themselves a little at a time because they don't wish to harm themselves.³⁴

"Now in myth and ritual the great instinctive forces of civilized life have their origin: law and order, commerce and profit, craft and art, poetry, wisdom and science. All are rooted in the primeval soil of play."

~Johan Huizinga

Health and safety law is often used as an excuse to stop children taking part in exciting activities, but well-managed risk is good for them. It engages their imagination, helps them learn and even teaches them to manage risks for themselves in the future. They won't understand about risk if they're wrapped in cotton wool. Risk itself won't damage children, but ill-managed and overprotective actions could!³⁵

3.5.6 Good and bad risk

Links to playwork literature

Good risks and hazards in a play provision are those that engage and challenge children and support their growth, learning and development. For example, changes in height that give children the opportunity to overcome fears and feel a sense of satisfaction in climbing.³⁶

"The very existence of youth is due in part to the necessity for play; the animal does not play because he is young, he has a period of youth because he must play."

~Karl Groos

Bad risks and hazards are those that are difficult or impossible for children to assess for themselves and that have no obvious benefit. For example, sharp edges or points on equipment . . . and items that include traps for heads or fingers.³⁶

Therefore, good risks and hazards are acceptable in play provision and playable spaces.³⁶

3.5.7 Risk benefit assessment

Links to playwork literature

Judgements by adults about the acceptability of risk are made on the basis of a risk assessment. Risk assessment and

management are not mechanistic processes. They crucially involve making judgements about acceptability based on an understanding of the balance between risks and benefits.³¹

Risk assessment should involve a risk-benefit trade-off between safety and other goals, which should be spelt out in the provider's policy.³¹

4. references and bibliography/ further reading

4.1 References

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² Hughes, B. (2001a), *Evolutionary playwork and reflective analytic practice*. 1st ed. Abingdon: Routledge. p.10.

³ See ¹ above, p.26.

⁴ Nicholson, S. (1971), *How not to cheat children: the theory of loose parts*. iP-Dip, (7), i-vi. (Originally published in *Landscape Architecture Quarterly*, 62 (1): 30-4).

⁵ Brown, F. (Ed) (2003), *Compound flexibility: the role of playwork in child development* in *Playwork: theory and practice*. 1st ed. Buckingham: Open University Press. p.52.

⁶ Maslow, A. (1971), *The farther reaches of human nature*. New York: Viking Press. Cited in: Brown, F. (2003), *Compound flexibility: the role of playwork in child development* in *Playwork: theory and practice*. 1st ed. Buckingham: Open University Press.

⁷ See ⁵ above, p.53.

⁸ Conway, M. (2003), *Professional playwork practice* in Brown, F. (Ed) (2003), *Playwork: theory and practice*, 1st ed. Buckingham: Open University Press. p.106-7.

⁹ See ² above, p.116.

¹⁰ See ² above, p.207.

"The process of play is important in itself - it need not have extrinsic goals."

~ Catherine Garvey 1991

¹¹ Moore, R.C. (1986), *Childhood's domain*. London: Croom Helm. Cited in: Hughes, B. (2001a), *Evolutionary playwork and reflective analytic practice*. 1st ed. Abingdon: Routledge.

¹² See ¹ above, p.6.

¹³ See ¹ above, p.28.

¹⁴ See ¹ above, p.8.

¹⁵ See ² above, p.9.

¹⁶ Sturrock, G. and Else, P. (1998), *The playground as therapeutic space: playwork as healing – the Colorado paper*. IPA/USA: Triennial National Conference. p.23.

¹⁷ SkillsActive (2008), *Playwork principles* [online]. Available from: www.skillsactive.com/playwork/principles (Accessed Feb 3, 2009)

¹⁸ Sturrock, G. and Else, P. (2007), *Ludemos: the home of therapeutic playwork* [online]. Available from: <http://www.ludemos.co.uk> (Accessed Aug 22, 2007)

¹⁹ See ¹⁶ above, p.2.

²⁰ Sturrock, G. (2003), *Towards a psycholudic definition of playwork* in Brown, F. (Ed) (2003), *Playwork: theory and practice*, 1st ed. Buckingham: Open University Press. p.94.

²¹ See ¹⁶ above, p.9.

²² See ¹⁶ above, p.4.

²³ Hughes, B. (2006), *Play types: speculations and possibilities*. 1st ed. London: The London Centre for Playwork Education and Training. p.xiii.

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²⁶ Hughes, B. (2007), *Bob Hughes has the last word on deep play*. iP-Dip, (1), 32.

²⁷ See ²⁴ above, p.27.

²⁸ See ¹ above, p.17.

²⁹ Bonel, P. and Lindon, J. (2000), *Playwork: a guide to good practice*. 2nd ed. Cheltenham: Nelson Thornes Ltd. p.282.

³⁰ See ² above, p.22.

³¹ Play Safety Forum (2008), *Managing risk in play provision: a position statement*. London: NCB/Play England.

³² Ouvry, M. (2000), *Exercising muscles and minds. Outdoor play and the early years curriculum*. London: National Early Years Network (reprinted by NCB 2003). Cited in: NICE (2008), *Physical play and children, review 8. Review of learning from practice: children and active play* [online]. Available from: www.nice.org.uk (Accessed Sep 8, 2008)

"You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation."

~ Plato

"Play is the highest expression of human development in childhood for it alone is the free expression of what is in the child's soul".

~ Friedrich Froebel
1887

³³ Ball, D., Gill, T., Speigal, B. (2008), *Managing risk in play provision: implementation guide*. London/Nottingham: Play England/DCSF. p.31

³⁴ Play Wales (2006), *Play and risk* [online]. Available from: www.playwales.org.uk (Accessed April 6, 2009)

³⁵ Health and Safety Executive (2009), *Myth of the month: children need to be wrapped in cotton wool to keep them safe* [online]. Available from: www.hse.gov.uk/myth/nov08.htm (Accessed April 6, 2009)

³⁶ See ³³ above, p. 32

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"If I get to pick what I want to do, then it's play...if someone else tells me that I have to do it, then it's work."

~ Patricia Nourot

