

# Play for Wales

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## Principles for Playworkers

**O**ver a year ago Play Wales secured funding from the Welsh Assembly Government to review the Playwork Assumptions and Values that were written a decade or so ago. The Assumptions and Values form an ethical base for playwork training. The Scrutiny Group that has been overseeing the development of the new proposal is satisfied that their job is finished, and feels it is time for them to be put to the test in the working environment.

We are pleased to announce that at a meeting between the Scrutiny Group and the Sector Skills Council, SkillsActive, it was agreed to put the Playwork Principles forward for endorsement by the Playwork Education

and Training Council and the Playwork National Occupational Standards Committee. If they are endorsed by both bodies, it is likely that they will be incorporated in Level 2, 3 and 4 training and will form part of the National Occupational Standards for playwork.

Early on in the process it was decided to differentiate the existing Assumptions and Values from the new proposal by calling the new one the Playwork Principles. Both are designed to inform the practice of playwork as a set of professional ethics, and are mostly used in playwork training, but they will inform any kind of play strategy or play development. They are designed to be used by all playworkers, in whatever context they work.

In the Final Phase of the consultation, having devised wording that reflected the responses to the first two phases, the Scrutiny Group felt that they had almost fulfilled their duty, and the final consultation was not about the content of the Principles, but asked questions such as:

- Is this fit for purpose?
- Have we done justice to playwork?
- Is this an improvement on the Assumptions and Values?

The final phase of the consultation closed on 23 February 2005. All playworkers in the UK were invited to respond, and the majority of responses were positive. After a final meeting to evaluate the responses to these questions, where it was agreed to make some slight amendments to the final version, the Group met with SkillsActive.

The Scrutiny Group will hold the Principles in trust for the playwork profession for the foreseeable future, until the emergence of an ethical body that would be better suited to taking on guardianship.

If you would like to know more please visit [www.playwales.org.uk](http://www.playwales.org.uk)

The Playwork principles are set out on page 3.



# EDITORIAL

**The theme of this editorial was inspired by conversations with play providers in Wales, who told us that there are those who prefer not to engage with Play Wales because we are seen as “too radical” and “only concerned with open access play”. Barbara Howe, who is now Multi-Agency Parenting Co-ordinator for Torfaen\*, helped us to write this piece in response:**

There are many beautiful myths and ancient stories in Wales that are cherished and nurtured like old friends and members of the family. They are part of our culture and must be passed on through the generations until time forgets us.

And comforting though myths are, we would like to dispel one of them. This myth has been passed on for several years and it involves us. In fact it has gained so much currency that even people who work closely with us, sometimes forget and believe that it is true. And here it is ...

“Play Wales/Chwarae Cymru is only concerned with staffed open access play and adventure playgrounds.”

Nothing could be further from the truth, but no story rises without a reason – when Play Wales/Chwarae Cymru was rescued from demise and reconstituted as a national charity at the end of the nineteen nineties, there was no other body that would or could promote staffed open access play provision or adventure playgrounds. The provision of staffed open access play had dwindled and desperately needed support as part of a range of services. Since we exist to promote and support all kinds of play provision on behalf children and young people, we stepped into the gap. However, there are many other areas where, as the national organisation for children’s play, we provide advice and guidance, and although we are a small organisation with a small budget, we try to have a wide impact. Expertise on open access play is only one element in the vast array of services available from the comprehensive toolkit of Play Wales.

The emergence of a profession will, inevitably, cause debate and discussion among agencies and individuals declaring an interest in the sector. Playwork is a classic example of such a sector, especially when taking into account the all-embracing nature of the work. It could be argued that historically, playwork has been seen as a preferred employment option of individuals who have other commitments that prevent them from pursuing a “real” career. But the knowledge and understanding of children’s play, and the sensitivity

towards children’s needs that is the foundation of the playwork approach is unique and can be applied to every environment in which children and young people exist, because play is so vital to their development and so much part of their lives. Play Wales seeks to ensure representation of the playwork approach at the highest political level and takes steps to promote good practice throughout the profession.

We were closely involved in the work of the Welsh Assembly Government Play Policy Implementation Group, and if you have read the recommendations you will see that we are committed to improving play opportunities wherever children and young people may be. This means everywhere: in school; at the doctor’s surgery; at a summer playscheme; at home; in childcare provision; at the local playground or park; on the wasteland behind the Village Hall; in the subway; in the lanes and streets, and up in the woods.

As a small team, we do this at a strategic level by offering advice and guidance to ministers and civil servants within the Assembly; by supporting Local Authority and Voluntary Sector play development and work on local play strategies; by working as trustees or members of steering groups for other organisations concerned with children; by being involved in the development of playwork training and education; and much more. We also provide practical advice and guidance for people working in the field in the form of briefings in this newsletter and on our website, and organising training events, seminars and conferences across the range of provision for children’s play.

Our publication ‘The First Claim . . .’ is firstly a quality assessment framework for playworkers – not just those working in open access provision, but playworkers in any facility where there are children and young people, and it is published in both Welsh and English. The research and knowledge within it can be used by anyone involved with children and young people – parents, playground designers, teachers, town planners and urban architects, toy librarians, and youthworkers to name but a few –

because ‘The First Claim . . .’ is about how children develop through play, and the best ways to facilitate and optimise this development.

The other label that has sometimes been attached to us is that we are “radical” (all those who consider us as part of the ‘establishment’ will sense a hint of irony at this) – we act as an advocate for children and young people and their play needs, and some of the issues we raise may be unfamiliar or challenging to some adults. It is important that we note that in many other countries some of the “radical” “new” initiatives that we promote are taken for granted as part of everyday life. In fact the knowledge that we don’t provide them in our country is often met with shock and dismay.

Research into child development and the benefits of quality play experiences moves on apace. At the same time children and young people’s opportunities to play are being eroded at a fierce rate. It isn’t always easy to lift our heads up from our daily stresses and obligations and really look at what is happening to our children and young people in Wales – the very valuable future of Wales – to take a deep breath and say it can’t continue to happen like this, and we must do something about it.

At Play Wales we are really proud that the other three nations of the UK are beginning to look towards Wales as leading the way on children and young people’s issues. Those who see it as an extension of England often overlook the unique nature of Wales, and it is good to be promoting our separate identity and making the news. We would like to see ourselves as part of a long Welsh history of brave dissenters and social reformers, and we would like to help all play providers in Wales be involved in the story.

\*Barbara worked until recently as the Children’s Services Co-ordinator in Blaenau Gwent – where she was responsible for co-ordinating Sure Start, the EYDCP and the Children’s Partnership – before that she was an Out of School Development Officer for Chwarae Teg.

## Play for Wales

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## Big Lottery – Big Chance for Play

**Play Development Officers from both the voluntary and public sector met with Peter Bryant, Senior Policy Officer of Big Lottery Fund, before the consultation on the priorities for future funding ended in March. Peter explained some of the plans that are being made for lottery distribution in Wales, and talked with Officers about the potential for children's play being adopted as an over-arching theme.**

The amount of money that Big Lottery has to distribute over the next few years will depend on lottery income and previous commitments – it could amount to between £100m – 140m in Wales. This may be affected if London wins the bid for the Olympic Games, because although there has been a commitment that funds will not be siphoned away from other areas, general Lottery income is likely to drop if the public choose to play a separate game to finance the bid.

There are likely to be between three and five programmes in Wales (as well as Mento Allan and the Young People's Fund - which have already been launched). Sixty or seventy per cent of funds will be directed towards the voluntary sector. There will be a greater emphasis on involving the public in consulting on what is seen as important, and decisions on grant making.

The Fund will be looking to grant aid projects that complement existing provision that is sustainable in the long term. They will also favour applications that are developmental, innovative and risk taking. Applications are likely to have to show organisations working together with others who can sustain funding on a longer term basis. There will be a focus on areas of social disadvantage and on promoting equal opportunities, and the Fund's priorities

will complement Welsh Assembly Government policy.

This means that the Big Lottery are interested in the forthcoming Play Strategy, and they have also been given the report of the 2002 Welsh consultation on the NOF £200m "for play". Many responses to the Play Policy Implementation (Play Strategy) Recommendations will have highlighted the need for increased funds to make them become a reality, so it is hoped that the play sector in Wales has responded to this funding consultation suggesting that play fits many of the Big Lottery priorities.

The Big Lottery consultation finished on 18 March. Through April more soundings will be taken from organisations that have already been consulted. Then the Welsh findings will be taken to the Big Lottery board in London. The first new Welsh funding programme is likely to be "something simple" rolled out in late 2005.

## Young People's Fund

A Big Lottery funding stream aimed to help young people enjoy life and fulfil their potential, develop skills and contribute to their community. There is £13m to commit between 2005 and 2009, and the programme will focus on 10– 19 year olds.

**Telephone 0845 410 2030 or visit [www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/programmes/ypfw](http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/programmes/ypfw)**

# Playwork Principles

continued from front page....

These Principles establish the professional and ethical framework for playwork and as such must be regarded as a whole. They describe what is unique about play and playwork, and provide the playwork perspective for working with children and young people. They are based on the recognition that children and young people's capacity for positive development will be enhanced if given access to the broadest range of environments and play opportunities.

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

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.

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

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.

# Welsh Language Play from Menter Iaith

Children are very, very important in regards to the Welsh Language. A look at statistics in Rhondda Cynon Taf tells us why – 13.5% of people in Rhondda Cynon Taf are able to speak Welsh but 30% of children are able to speak Welsh. This is due to the success of Welsh medium education with Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin and bilingual junior and high schools at the front of a linguistic revolution. There are similar figures throughout Wales. Throughout Wales as well there are some 25 Mentrau Iaith or Welsh Language Initiatives – each one a separate although similar organisation – and every one of them is involved in working with children.

Menter Iaith Rhondda Cynon Taf has eighteen after school hours play-care facilities under the name of Clwb Carco and four play-care holiday play schemes. You will note that like many providers we have no problem whatsoever in combining the two elements of play and care. The simplistic and often dogmatic division of these services by specialists

and funders is a nightmare for Menter Iaith and many other providers. Completely open access play is not usually an option when children have to travel to centralised bilingual provision. Children and parental choice of play can still be central to the provision.

All the schemes were set up with OSCI and then New Opportunities Fund start up grants and we are delighted to have maintained almost all of our services. Two after school clubs and two holiday schemes have been closed for financial reasons in a twelve year period of operation but all of the services are under constant threat of closure due to lack of finance to support and administer the clubs to the increasingly high standards necessary. Again dogma and politics seem to be the biggest threats to our services – we have had great difficulty in obtaining support from Cymorth for example.

Let's finish on a positive note. We do have eighteen after school hour clubs



and four holiday play schemes open at the moment. We are one of the biggest providers of play in Rhondda Cynon Taf. We employ 40-50 people a day and provide services for over two hundred and fifty children each day. Thousands of parents depend on our services. The children to play in Welsh, we provide employment for Welsh speakers and Welsh learners and lots of opportunities for volunteering. We train hundreds of people and contribute to the social development and education of thousands of children through our play-care services. We are very proud of our contribution.

Steffan Webb  
CEO  
Menter Iaith Rhondda Cynon Taf  
Contact Steffan on 01685 877183

## Regulating Care Standards for Under 8s

The Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales (CSIW) recently announced plans to reform the regulation of social care services in Wales, with service users' day to day experiences of care now becoming the key focus of CSIW's work.

Play Wales invited Jackie Evans, CSIW's Strategic Director for Under Eights, to explain how this new reform will impact on the playwork profession in Wales, and asked whether it will help reduce the burden of inspection on providers.

"Many providers seem to feel that quality play provision is being jeopardised by a regulatory culture which means that the needs of the children are being overlooked, while issues such as cleanliness and orderliness take precedence," said Jackie Evans.

"This is actually very far from being true, and we intend to make sure that we get this message across.

"CSIW is already in discussion with numerous under eights stakeholders, including Play Wales. By talking to providers, parents and carers and, of course, the children themselves, we can ensure that our new approach is

informed by a wide range of views before we actually implement the new reform," said Mrs. Evans.

Play Wales' Development Officers and CSIW Inspectors recently attended a series of three regional training sessions aimed at strengthening the relationship between the two organisations, increasing the inspectors' knowledge of play and playwork while also dispelling the many myths which surround inspection.

"Although CSIW expects to find certain care, protection and safety standards met when they carry out inspections, we certainly do not want to see play provision becoming unexciting and sterile" said Mrs. Evans.

The key elements of CSIW's new approach will be:

- To ensure that inspection is based on the childminding and day care regulations 2002 while taking the national minimum standards into account;
- To ensure that the experiences of the children and their parents/carers are a crucial part of the inspection process;

- To ensure that the intensity of inspection is matched to the needs of the service - a targeted approach concentrating on areas where regulation is needed most;
- A new streamlined regulation-focused inspection which will include a significant element of self-assessment, placing a lesser burden on the provider and allowing inspectors to spend more time with the children and parents/carers;
- Greater emphasis on unannounced inspections.

Marianne Mannello, Development Officer for Play Wales, welcomed the opportunity to discuss the reforms:

"We will continue to monitor the experience of providers and look forward to working with the CSIW. Our joint aim is to support a consistent and play friendly approach - which is good news for play providers and even better news for the children. We want to see children and young people having a great time in safe yet stimulating settings and CSIW are totally behind us in that."

# Play, Risk and Accidents

**Children and young people's play opportunities are being eroded by our increasingly litigious culture. Playground providers face huge insurance bills that can sometimes mean the closure of provision, or at least the removal of equipment that might be the site of an accident. Some schools are reported as taking draconian steps to cut down on any potentially risky play activity. At the same time there appears to be no curb on the advertising practices of the 'no win, no fee' law firms and others that are encouraging members of the public to claim for accidents. In the end, while some families may gain financially, the majority of our children lose out.**

A recent investigation into the compensation culture on BBC Wales' The Blame Game, highlighted the real problem of fraudulent claims for playground and highway injuries against local councils. According to the programme, the councils are "signing up to a cross-border fraud database which will help them identify suspicious claimants." But whether it is a false or a justified case, a claim for £2,000 for an injury can cost a council as much as £20,000 in fees and costs. Given that funds are limited this inevitably leads to playground managers and school governing bodies erring on the side of caution.

A considerable part of the problem is the willingness of insurers to settle out of court, rather than to contest claims. However, we have heard that one Welsh Local Authority is starting to take a stand against playground claims, and we would be interested to hear from anyone who knows of examples where this may be happening.

Play Wales is actively engaged in trying to improve the situation. As you may already know we provide playground inspection training courses and playground design and inspection consultancy, and we also have a member of staff who is listed as an expert witness for playground injury cases. At a more strategic level, we are involved in a Home Office initiative to address the impact of vexatious litigation on the work of the voluntary sector, including children's play providers.

In a recent interview in the Observer, Tony Blair said 'I was quite shocked to be told by people who were running a nursery that they were worried about letting the kids out into the playground when it was wet in case one of them slipped and fell and they ended up having a legal case [against them]. We have got to look at a way of getting people protection on that.'

Others are also advocating a more sensible and down to earth approach to children's play and accidents. In a recent press release on paddling pools the Deputy Director General of the Health and Safety Executive stated:

"Sensible health and safety is about managing risks, not eliminating them all. HSE is not in the business of stamping out

simple pleasures wherever they appear at whatever cost. We recognise the benefits to children's development of play, which necessarily involves some risk, and this shouldn't be sacrificed in the pursuit of the unachievable goal of absolute safety."

This is the latest in a number of communications from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) that promote this view, and it is clear that the Executive has little time for conker-banning measures that are often reported in the media.

In its advertising material for a forthcoming conference, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents states: "Over the last few years there has been a tendency to "sanitise" areas where children play and in trying to prevent litigation, eliminate all risk to a point that children find them boring and so play elsewhere in more dangerous locations."

As long ago as 2002 the HSE published research by Professor David Ball of the Middlesex University Centre for Decision Analysis and Risk Management, the aim of which was to consider the effectiveness of the various steps taken to improve playground safety in recent years. He found little evidence that the impact absorbing surface makes any difference to the number of injuries suffered by children. At the same time we hear that playgrounds are being closed for want of funds to provide this specialist surfacing, and that schools that are improving their play provision for children, are spending hard-won money on this surfacing in the mistaken belief that it will prevent injury.

While none of us would condone hazardous and unsafe management of playgrounds, we also recognise that accidents while playing are a natural part of growing up, and that it is in children and young people's very nature to test themselves against their environment. If you have experience of having to balance health and safety and insurance issues with children and young people's play needs within play provision, please contact us.

Professor Ball is speaking at our Spirit of Adventure Play conference in May, find a report on his findings at: [www.hse.gov.uk/press/2002/e02079.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/press/2002/e02079.htm) and further research at [www.mdx.ac.uk/risk/research/projects](http://www.mdx.ac.uk/risk/research/projects)

For further details of the RoSPA international conference "Protection V Risk Experience" (Stratford-upon-Avon 6 June 2005) ring 0870 777 2120 or e-mail [events@rospa.com](mailto:events@rospa.com)

To download "Managing Risk in Play Provision" a statement by the Play Safety Forum visit [www.ncb.org.uk/cpc/psf.asp](http://www.ncb.org.uk/cpc/psf.asp)

## Help Us Improve Play for Wales

We are running a survey on Play for Wales so that we can make it even more useful to people working in the play field in Wales. This newsletter is published and distributed free of charge three times a year to people involved in play provision in Wales.

We would be very grateful if you would complete the questionnaire insert and return it to us at the Freepost address provided. One lucky response will earn its writer a voucher for £20. Thank you for your help.



# Language and Play Wales

Play Wales acts as an advocate for children and their play needs whatever the language they speak. It is important to us that children have access to provision where they can communicate in their preferred language with other children and playworkers - whether it be in Welsh, English, or for example, Urdu.

As a national organisation in a country with a rich heritage and culture in two languages, Play Wales has always tried to follow good practice in providing equal opportunities. Our publications and our own adverts for posts are always bilingual, and we tirelessly raise the issue at UK meetings with other partners who need reminding about Welsh language issues. However, we still feel that we could go further, and we are working together with Estyn Llaw (an organisation set up to help others adopt and sustain a bilingual approach) to look at workable practices that will make our organisation more representative and more useful to the play sector across Wales.

Our country is forging ahead with strategies for play provision and childcare that will be successful if there is a strong and well-trained workforce to support them - playworkers who are up to date with play and playwork theory and practice and able to provide for children's play needs. As part of this it is vital that we have a strong cohort of Welsh speaking playworkers who can lead new play developments, or train as trainers, to provide for the growing number of children who are brought up speaking the language. So before we have even started the content of the new playwork training course we are developing as part of the Cwlwm project, we are seeking guidance from Estyn Llaw on how we can make it attractive and relevant to Welsh speakers. If you would like to support us in this work, please contact Gill Evans or Tillie Mobbs at our national office.

Gill Evans, our Information Officer, got fed up of making excuses and started learning Welsh last September. Although her heart still lies in Yorkshire, it is part of a commitment to living and working in Wales, and to the children who grow up here. Play Wales is paying for the course and allowing time off for study. Now all she needs is practice, confidence and time to learn the vocabulary that describes our work - but the hardwork is well worth it:

"I might not be up to a telephone conversation yet, but I can handle e-mails and letters with the help of my trusty dictionary. The best thing of all was sitting through my third Urdd Eisteddfod in Cardiff I could finally grasp what was going on, and I didn't need a friend to whisper in my ear when my boys' results were announced."

If you would like to review the approach to bilingualism within your organisation, please contact Estyn Llaw on 0800 9177 969 or e-mail [yhmhol@estynllaw.org](mailto:yhmhol@estynllaw.org)

## Integrated Children's Centres and Open Access Play

New Integrated Children's Centres (ICCs) are being established in each Local Authority Area in Wales. Like the Children's Centres in England they include early years and childcare provision, and community development/training, but unlike our neighbours, in Wales the Centres include Open Access Play. We hope to feature a series of reports from around the country on how different ICCs have approached this element of the brief.

In the meantime the Institute of Welsh Affairs is being funded by the Assembly to chart the development of the ICCs. Their interim report was published in February. Please contact the IWA on 029 20575511 for a copy of 'Integrated Centres in Wales'.

**Swansea is developing an adventure playground as the open access element of its first Integrated Children's Centre (ICC). What is different to many other ICCs in Wales, is that the Adventure Playground will open first. Ben Greenaway of PlayRight reports.**

The Children's Centre is a Local Authority project and PlayRight is a partner running the open access play element. I am the team leader responsible for getting the playground up and running, and the Local Authority has employed a Centre Manager responsible for the other elements of the ICC.

The Children's Centre is going to be based in the Penlan area, attached to Clwyd School. After extensive consultation with local children the Adventure Playground will be developed on a more central site of Penlan - where the children wanted it to be.

Staffing the Playground is the next challenge - at present I am a team leader with no team! PlayRight has submitted a bid to the Working Neighbourhoods project, which is a central government pilot scheme to improve the employability of people in the Penderry Ward. We hope to employ four trainees to gain a level 2 CACHE certificate in playwork whilst getting practical experience of working on an adventure playground. In the second year we hope to keep on two of those people and put them through the Level 3 diploma and take on another three people to go through the level 2.

While all this has been going on I have been getting things up and running so the children have some kind of play provision in the meantime. We have started a play club one evening a week in the local Methodist church, working in partnership with Swansea Council's Play Team and the church. Eventually the club will be taken over and run by local people. We also ran a playscheme over February half-term. On the first day words like 'what have I got myself into?' crossed my mind, but I left work to find that a child had written "FUSK" (sic) in wax crayon on the bonnet of my car because he hadn't wanted the club to close - I choose to take it as a compliment!

I have also been getting out and about in the community raising support. We now have the backing of all the local schools, the Communities First Co-ordinator, the local police, and lots of residents. A large number of people are ready to help out with building the playground, volunteering, or just looking out for it at night when it's closed. I sit on the Penlan Partnership Group, who see the Adventure Playground as one of the most beneficial projects to come to the community.

But the people with the most support for this project are the children, who are really excited. I just hope this can be sustained as we go through adult agendas like the planning process. [I think all play provision should be exempt from planning law. Perhaps this could be Play Wales next challenge?] We are hoping to be up and running by the summer holidays, ahead of the rest of the Children's Centre, and we have a busy few months ahead. So watch this space!!

Contact Ben on 01792 294884 or e-mail [ben@playright.org.uk](mailto:ben@playright.org.uk)

**Never underestimate the randomness of life! How does someone who shuffles papers end up helping to develop an open access adventure playground? Chris Girvan tells us of his personal journey in helping set up Gwenfro Valley Adventure Playground as part of an ICC in Wrexham.**

Up to this point in my life the only contact I had with playworkers was across committee tables. Those I had met all seemed to be committed to some ethos of inclusive play, and they were pretty uncompromising when it came to how they were prepared to do their work. This sort of attitude is unhelpful when you are trying to file your folders.

One dark December day, the Caia Park Community First Co-ordinator informed me that I was to help the local ICC. The childcare provision, and Early Years Entitlement, and even the community training was fairly sorted, but, and there is always a but, the open access play element was literally being started from the ground up. Fortunately I had support from Adam Hughes, a Youth Worker employed by Caia Park Communities First in a youth engagement project, who also works at The Venture adventure playground here in Wrexham.

Wrexham Council had obtained a New Opportunities Fund Grant to cover the cost of building the access road and the fence surrounding the site, so things seemed pretty good. They were keen to see the project up and going, but the local play workers who know all about this stuff wanted the kids to be included in the build. These folks are more interested in the process of a build - the developmental benefits to children of involving them, and how young people are made to feel apart of it - than starting and finishing a project.

So what can the problems be? I soon discovered there is no clear entry route into creating adventure playgrounds. Throughout the dusty halls of official bodies I have found those who agree to the ethos of participation but back away from the practical application of it. I must confess that most of the people I have dealt with are pretty decent and helpful, but the process of including children in play structure construction genuinely scares people.

I have had the privilege of talking with Play Wales advisors like Tony Chilton who has talked me through the values of participation and some of the practical implications. I have gained a deeper insight into the do-ability of creating an adventure playground through talking to Adam and the workers at the Venture. Even as a paper shuffler I have found myself getting off the fence and saying we should persevere in trying to deliver this with young people's involvement. Why? Because we should! It stops us seeing play facilities as something we drop into young people's worlds and helps us see it as a way to empower and enrich young people's lives.

I can almost see the end of this project and I have my folder sitting on the table ready to file away. It has been difficult to



find myself caught between two cultures; those who want a project completed and delivered, and those who want young people to be involved in the process and allowed to own the site from its beginning. We will have our access road and paths and we will have our fence surrounding the adventure play site where young people will design and participate in its on going development.

But, the very last one, the best thing is those play workers who refused to keep quiet - especially the Venture Manager Malcolm King and Adam. As a result the young people will get to lay claim to their play space by building the fence that defines it as theirs. A lot of good people from the community, especially Mrs Chris Thomas the chair of Communities First, who sits on the various committees, persevered to allow young people to be a part of what happens in their community. They did this despite the many official voices telling them that it is not possible! One in the eye for paper shufflers!

Chris Girvan & Adam Hughes

Contact Chris on 01978 316767

# Play and Disadvantage working in Romania

**I**n the fourth article in our series on play provision from an international perspective, Fraser Brown, Lecturer at Leeds Metropolitan University, writes about his experience of providing play opportunities for children in Romania.

At the end of 1989 the Romanian people overthrew one of the most ruthless dictators of modern times. In the immediate aftermath, the outside world began to learn the true horrors of the Ceausescu regime – and the most horrifying of all was the plight of the children. The regime had banned childbirth control and abortion as part of its drive to build a bigger workforce, with the result that unwanted babies were abandoned when they were born. Tens of thousands of children filled the state-run orphanages, where the regime was often inhuman and brutal, with untrained staff and few funds for adequate food or medicine.

One of our students had spent two years working in one of these places before deciding to return to the UK to enrol on the Playwork degree course. During her second year, she chose to complete her experiential learning placement in Romania, and she and another student spent three months working at an orphanage in Bucharest. When my wife and I made a visit, it was the start of an involvement that continues to this day.

At first we became involved with a charity (the White Rose Initiative) working in the town of Sighisoara, where a group of abandoned children were living in a paediatric hospital. The children had suffered abuse and neglect over many years - they had spent most of their lives tied into a cot in a small room - and I believe they were among the most play deprived children in the world.

The charity established a therapeutic playwork project aimed at aiding their recovery. The project was a tremendous success and included the training of a



Queuing for the weekly hot meal

Romanian playworker at Leeds Met. A former playwork student, Sophie Webb, and I conducted a research project focusing on the developmental progress made by the children as a result of their involvement.<sup>1</sup>

Of the sixteen children on the hospital ward, fourteen were eventually fostered or adopted within Romania, and in the past four years forty more have benefited from the project. The hospital has changed its working regime and now aims to find a family placement for abandoned children within six months - they are generally successful. The average age of the children in the hospital has dropped, and the project has become more about care and prevention and less about rescue and recovery.

We are still involved, but have now shifted our focus to a different form of disadvantage. Romania has the largest Roma population in the world – probably around 2 million – and they suffer routine discrimination. The Roma have been described as “the national scapegoat for Romania’s immense problems”.<sup>2</sup> They are not travelling people, but live in

shanty towns, in tumble-down houses made of mud and wood, with no floor, no amenities, sometimes no roof. There is little money for food and medicines, and life expectancy is extremely short. It is very hard for adults to find employment.

Last year we were introduced to a British woman, Katie Sammons, who was struggling to provide basic living standards for four hundred Roma families in Cold Valley village in Transylvania. This inspired us to set up a charitable trust – Aid for Romanian Children. Our aim is to provide vital resources and education for the village children. The funds we raise help to pay for food, clothing, medical supplies, housing and schooling, and we also run summer camps. Through our charity we seek to promote the view that it is the Roma’s plight that is the problem, not the Roma themselves.

This summer volunteers from Leeds Metropolitan University ran camps for around a hundred and twenty children. They describe their experience here:

“There are around 600 kids in the village. The camps are a chance for some of them to escape from the everyday hardship of



the village, to a place that is clean and safe. It allows them to be kids and to realise that they have choices in life.”

“Learning more about the impoverished system in Romania has opened my eyes. The children would play with anything they could find.”

“The children are the happiest I have ever met.”

I have included these quotes as they highlight a very significant issue for playworkers, and play providers – namely the power of play in the face of material deprivation. In the past, play projects have often justified their existence on the grounds that they were addressing the needs of economically disadvantaged children. In fact our experience of working on projects in Romania provides some support for the view that play deprivation has the potential to be a more serious problem than material disadvantage.<sup>iii</sup> By most standards the Cold Valley children are chronically impoverished, and yet they are sociable and have strong family ties. They are often physically strong and agile – climbing trees without a thought.



**Sledging on pop bottles**

We have been particularly struck by the invention and creativity in their play. For example they play “elastics” or “French



**Cold Valley Village**

skipping” by winding old tights and tying them together to make skipping ropes; they play tiddly winks with bottle tops; in the winter they split pop bottles in half and use them as sledges. The complexity and creativity of the children’s play also appears to confirm Nicholson’s Theory of Loose Parts –

“In any environment both the degree of inventiveness and creativity, and the possibility of discovery, are directly proportional to the number and kinds of variables in it”.<sup>iv</sup>

These children are surrounded by wood, debris, and all manner of junk. Thus they live in an environment that is full of loose parts, and they appear to be significantly more creative in their play than the modern day UK child, whose life often consists of being shuttled between adult dominated environments furnished with sophisticated toys and equipment that leave very little to the imagination. The creative aspect of the Roma children’s behaviour is the subject of continued research.

In Cold Valley village there is a community that experiences levels of poverty not seen in Britain since the 19th Century, yet, as a general rule the children are friendly, active, creative and happy. [This is not to belittle the long term impact of poverty on the Roma children, especially in terms of health and education.] In contrast, the play deprived children who were discovered in the hospital in Sighisoara spent their lives rocking in their cots, staring vacantly into space.

It seems the lesson to be learned here is to avoid simplistic explanations of the relationship between child development and the child’s economic status. Children who have supportive families, plenty of playmates, and a stimulating play environment are more likely to make the most of their existence. Children deprived of play will be more likely to retreat into an inward looking shell, where they can blot out the pain of the outside world.

Dr Fraser Brown

<sup>i</sup> We provide a summary of our work in the book *Playwork: Theory and Practice*, F. Brown (ed), Buckingham, Open University Press (2003)

<sup>ii</sup> Crowe, DM (1995) *A History of the Gypsies of Eastern Europe and Russia*. London, IB Tauris

<sup>iii</sup> Hughes, B (2001) *Evolutionary Playwork and Reflective Analytic Practice*. London, Routledge

<sup>iv</sup> Nicholson, S (1971) *The Theory of Loose Parts*. In *Landscape Architecture Quarterly*, Vol 62, No 1, October 1971 and *Bulletin for Environmental Education* No 12 April 1972, London, Town and Country Planning Association

Aid for Romanian Children is a registered charity (no. 1098344). If you would like to know more about their projects, or to make a donation, please contact them on 01904 635018 or e-mail [annebrown47@hotmail.com](mailto:annebrown47@hotmail.com)

# TRAINING TRAINING TRAINING TRAINING

## Playwork Training in Cardiff

Children's Play Services in Cardiff have always been committed to providing play training, but during the last three years their approach has become more strategic and they have extended their remit to cover training at levels one to three. Richard Trew, Play Trainer, describes their approach and tells us his views on playwork training:

Currently, we offer an Introductory Playwork Course, a Summer Playworker's Course, the CACHE Certificate in Playwork, the CACHE Diploma in Playwork, and the fast-track City and Guilds Certificate in Work with Children (APEL). In addition to the accredited courses, we offer regular issue-based workshops as part of our commitment to the continuing professional development of playworkers. Most recently, we have begun to offer electronic interactive learning materials to support our accredited courses - students who have grown up with Information Technology are very comfortable with these resources.

This year promises to be an exciting one for playwork with the imminent release of the new Playwork Principles, the New Horizons strategy for the future of the playwork sector, the impact of the New Occupational Standards, and in Wales the development of a training endorsement mechanism. All these initiatives will impact substantially on the future provision of playwork training and qualifications on offer in Wales.

What should good quality playwork training comprise? Perhaps a better question would be what should it enable playworkers to know and do? Well, I concentrate on content, application and delivery:

1. The heart of every playwork course should feature a sound examination of the play process and our response to it as playworkers. This is, after all, what makes our profession unique. Playwork training should not be an endless round of policy and procedures removed from their context in the play process. Does this mean there can be no effective cross-sector training and working? Far from it. By clearly defining what is distinctive, we highlight what is shared across allied professions.

2. Successful training is not simply about the transfer of knowledge from the tutor to the student. Training should allow for positive experiences that lead to the first hand development of knowledge and practical techniques. However, we need to ensure that each of these abilities can be contextualised. That is, playworkers know when to do something as well as how to do something and this in turn depends on a sound and holistic view of the play process. This subtle skill lies at the heart of much of what the playworker does.

3. One concern about the future of playwork training is that in the debate about what playworkers should know we forget how they should know. High quality design and content of courses will count for little if the delivery of playwork training is poor. A key aim for the future must surely be to establish a mechanism to ensure consistent, measurable high standards in the delivery of playwork qualifications.

Ultimately, high quality teaching and learning must underpin the development of playwork as a profession, and this in turn is essential if we are to secure the future of playwork and change perceptions on the importance of our role in facilitating children's play.

Contact Richard on 029 20873944

## The Profession of Playwork

The Playwork sector has sought to defend its unique contribution to the needs of children and young people by fashioning an impressive array of qualifications that maintains the integrity of the sector whilst acknowledging legal prerogatives such as the Child Minding and Day Care (Wales) Regulations 2002.

The title of 'Playwork Professional', however, remains elusive evidenced by the fact that the term 'playworker' is used without restriction. Anyone can use that title without the requirement to link it back to a nationally recognised qualification or allied salary scales. The purpose of this article is to examine opportunities that could and are being exploited in Wales to allow the play work sector to seek parity with allied professions (such as teaching or social services) with the knowledge that the body of expertise, experience and integrity collectively shared matches and complements that demonstrated in these professions.

In common with other areas of the 'informal education' sector, the title play-worker can be applied to a wide range of individuals. On the continuum are enthusiastic but unqualified volunteers, the seasonal workers, full-time face to face practitioners and, finally, strategic managers in local authorities and voluntary organisations.

The Playwork sector is currently being driven to adopt minimum qualification standards at NVQ Level 2 and Level 3, not as part of a planned workforce development programme, but in response to the National Standards for the Regulation of Under Eights' Daycare and Childminding incorporated into the Children's Act 1985. This focus, whilst commendable in terms of child protection, belies the fact that the sector operates within a much wider age range and has a corresponding and equally important requirement to develop the unique skills and value base that is intrinsic to the field of playwork.

The professional development of individual workers embraced within the playwork continuum should be the major driver of workforce qualification targets purely to drive up and maintain standards of service in the sector. In order to achieve this, there are key objectives we must achieve:

- Qualifications linked to the roles identified within the National Occupational Standards for Playwork.
- Job titles and job descriptions linked to those roles and the rate of pay should be linked to the duties of the post rather than to a qualification.
- Qualifications matched to the National Qualifications Framework to reflect the different level of expertise required and thus reflect the complexity of roles undertaken at the various levels of the profession.

Are you still with me? In the diagram below, I have attempted to represent my recommendation of what the Playwork sector should try to establish within the next decade to move Playwork securely into the 21st Century and beyond. It represents a number of qualification levels to which all playwork posts could potentially be graded. The development of a so-called 'Coherent Route' should be undertaken as a partnership between the employers as service providers, and training agencies. Initially, all posts, including those of volunteers, should be graded by mapping them against the

National Qualification Framework level indicators and the National Occupational Standards where appropriate. Following this, an analysis of the qualification level of the existing workforce should be juxtaposed against the findings of the initial grading exercise to establish the scale of 'up-skilling' that is required at all levels within the profession. Finally, a workforce development plan should be produced establishing incremental steps on the road to achieving the goal of an 'all qualified' profession.

### A Coherent Route to Playwork Qualifications

Recommended Qualification Level	NQF Level	Appropriate Post Title	NQF Level Indicator
BA Hons in Playwork	Level 6	Graduate Playworker	Level 6 qualifications recognise a specialist high level knowledge of an area of work or study to enable the use of an individual's own ideas and research in response to complex problems and situations. Learning at this level involves the achievement of a high level of professional knowledge and is appropriate for people working as knowledge-based professionals or in professional management positions. Level 6 qualifications are at a level equivalent to Bachelors degrees with honours, graduate certificates and graduate diplomas.
Diploma of Higher Education in Playwork	Level 5	Qualified Playworker	Level 5 qualifications recognise the ability to increase the depth of knowledge and understanding of an area of work or study to enable the formulation of solutions and responses to complex problems and situations. Learning at this level involves the demonstration of high levels of knowledge, a high level of work expertise in job roles and competence in managing and training others. Qualifications at this level are appropriate for people working as higher grade technicians, professionals or managers. Level 5 qualifications are at a level equivalent to intermediate Higher Education qualifications such as Diplomas of Higher Education, Foundation and other degrees that do not typically provide access to postgraduate programmes.
Certificate of Higher Education in Playwork	Level 4	Professional Trainee	Level 4 qualifications recognise specialist learning and involve detailed analysis of a high level of information and knowledge in an area of work or study. Learning at this level is appropriate for people working in technical and professional jobs, and/or managing and developing others. Level 4 qualifications are at a level equivalent to Certificates of Higher Education.
NVQ in Playwork Level III or equivalent	Level 3	Play Support Worker Second Level	Level 3 qualifications recognise the ability to gain, and where relevant apply a range of knowledge, skills and understanding. Learning at this level involves obtaining detailed knowledge and skills. It is appropriate for people wishing to go to university, people working independently, or in some areas supervising and training others in their field of work.
NVQ in Playwork Level II or equivalent	Level 2	Play Support Worker First Level	Level 2 qualifications recognise the ability to gain a good knowledge and understanding of a subject area of work or study, and to perform varied tasks with some guidance or supervision. Learning at this level involves building knowledge and/or skills in relation to an area of work or a subject area and is appropriate for many job roles.
Introduction and Induction	Not applicable	New Recruits	Level 1 qualifications recognise basic knowledge and skills and the ability to apply learning with guidance or supervision. Learning at this level is about activities which mostly relate to everyday situations and may be linked to job competence.

Let us fast forward a year or two. Having constructed a coherent route to qualification, graded all posts within playwork to appropriate qualification levels, and prepared a workforce development plan to provide market research intelligence for training providers, you could be excused in thinking that the Playwork Profession had now completed its task and could gaze contentedly into the ubiquitous play scheme camp fire but no!

The quality management of training is not a subject best left to training institution quality managers or representatives of Her Majesty's Inspectorate. Professional endorsement is a key function of ensuring that playwork theory is acquired, applied and is reflected upon. Skills Active are promoting this process across the UK and in Wales, Play Wales has taken up the baton. Considerable advances have been made to empower the field in undertaking what is a complex function requiring an Education and Training Standards group to represent the profession, advising, inspecting and monitoring the training agencies to ensure standards are maintained.

Finally, still gasping from the exertions, the profession will then need to ensure its constituent parts are not only initially qualified but remain fit to practice and demonstrate this through a robust continuing professional development framework. Anyone for training?

Alun Griffiths, is the Secretary to the Education & Training Standards Committee of Wales

Alun can be contacted via the Wales Youth Agency.



# EVENTS

Play Wales will send you our Training and Events e-Bulletin if you ring us or e-mail us and ask to be added to the database. We also run a job advertising service for play providers and those looking for play jobs in Wales. Contact Phil on 029 20486050 or phil@playwales.org.uk

## Risk Assessment Seminar Playlink

12 April 2005, Central London - for more details go to [www.playlink.org.uk](http://www.playlink.org.uk) or phone: 07946 527264

## Play in the Countryside

making it happen for children and young people, South East Regional Play Association Annual Conference, 23 April 2005, Guildford. E-mail [hanna@playwork.org.uk](mailto:hanna@playwork.org.uk)

## Healing Through Play

an introduction to play as therapy Community Insight, 26 April 2005, London. Ring 01793 512612 for more details.

## The Spirit of Adventure Play

Play Wales, 11 and 12 May 2005, Cardiff. A place to recharge, refresh and review your playwork practice – presentations, workshops, time to network and get inspired. Contact Phil MacLeod for booking details on 029 2048 6050.

## Play: Learning for Life

International Play Association, 18 – 22 July 2005, Berlin. For more information go to [www.ipa2005.de](http://www.ipa2005.de)

## Learning Hub Pilot Takes Off

Skillsactive Wales, the Sector Skills Council for playwork, has been looking at skills issues facing employers in Wales in order to improve access to training and education.

They are currently piloting Learning Hubs – which will work on two levels:

- Employer networks - drawing together and co-ordinating training needs and communicating requirements.
- Training provider 'Hub sites' will co-ordinate links to a wider regional delivery network. Those links will include the regional ELWa office, other local training providers, existing employer groups, CCETs (Community Consortia for Education & Training), national organisations and professional interest organisations.

The intention is to have three Learning Hubs across Wales, in the North, South and Mid Wales, and if they are successful Skillsactive will roll them out across the UK.

Following an open tender process, Coleg Glan Hafren in Cardiff are running a six month pilot. Andy Evans, Business Development Manager, who runs the pilot, said, "We are extremely pleased to have secured this project and look forward to the challenge ahead. The early response from employers is very positive and we hope to broker partnerships with a variety of training providers in order to meet local needs."

Andy has been meeting with stakeholders in the playwork sector. If you feel you can either source or offer training and education in playwork in South Wales, contact Andy on 029 2040 6520 or email [evans\\_a@glan-hafren.ac.uk](mailto:evans_a@glan-hafren.ac.uk)

## Book Reviews

### The Buskers Guide to Playwork

Shelly Newstead  
Common Threads Publications £8.50

Doug Cole, Play Development Officer with Cardiff County Council reviews a new playwork publication and recent addition to the Play Wales Library:

Now I best say to start with that this pocket sized seventy-page guide provided me with ample opportunity to engage in some classic diversionary activity one afternoon. It was either try and sort out the budget, or get round to fulfilling my promise to write a review, guess which won!

The Buskers Guide to Playwork aims to define what playwork is – a bold venture when one considers the number of trees that have already been sacrificed to date in pursuit of this aim.

So did it work? I have to say on balance it did. This is an honest and realistic introduction that resonated with me and I'm sure it will with many playworkers.

The book attempts to cover a lot: playwork and play; what constitutes playwork; playwork places; adults and play; and it asks the question are we doing it right? Each of these topics could take up the whole seventy pages in itself, but this is a quick reference guide, and for the most part it succeeds.

As I was reading it I began to ask myself who are the audience for the book, [apart from Play Development Officers who should be sorting out their budget!]

Shelley states in the introduction that she would like The Buskers Guide to be read by individuals before going on training courses, and I think there is merit in this. As the book goes on however, it seems to lose a little direction and becomes less about preparing people for playwork training, and more about an ongoing analysis of playwork, or convincing the uninitiated as to what playwork is in practice. Both have their merit and perhaps this guide tries to do too much rather than concentrating on the one aspect.

I am sure that this little guide will be of use, and congratulations to anyone that tries to define playwork in seventy small pages.

### Global Glue

Common Threads Publications £14.10

This is a very exciting resource, not only is it creative, thought provoking and fun - it is also educational. Global glue has easy to follow instructions and activity sheets and if you couldn't quite imagine what an Innukshuk would look like there are photographs and illustrations that really bring it all together.

I thought I would try the activities on a smaller scale rather than on a large scale to see if they were easily adaptable. I work on a Play Bus and thought this would be the ideal place to try it out. It worked really well, with the children creating a rain forest and a video room in the kitchen upstairs, and some of the smaller activities went down stairs - like rice writing - because of limited space. The children had a great time and were full of questions, so you really need to do your homework on the subject you're introducing them to.

Global Glue is so adaptable it can be used as a whole project or in smaller parts, the activities can be used with all ages, and abilities. This is a resource that can be and will be used time after time in our project, if you have not already got it I recommend that you do, it's fantastic.

Deb, Valleys Kids

Contact Common Threads on 07000 785 215 or email [playwords@commonthreads.co.uk](mailto:playwords@commonthreads.co.uk)