

Play for Wales

Play news and briefing from the national organisation for play

Spring 2009



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Play in the computer age



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www.playwales.org.uk



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Contact the Editor at:
Play Wales, Baltic House,
Mount Stuart Square,
Cardiff CF10 5FH

Telephone: 029 2048 6050
E-mail: info@playwales.org.uk
Registered Charity No. 1068926

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 Tel: 01443 843520
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Editorial

'Spring' is a time of new growth and regeneration, the word also signifies a rapid forward or upward movement. In terms of children's play here in Wales, the moves made in the start of Spring are indicative of both new growth and upward movement.

In early March, the draft Children and Families (Wales) Measure was laid before the National Assembly. The measure will help improve the lives of vulnerable children and families in Wales. It sets a clear direction for the Welsh Assembly Government's aim to improve quality of life and equality of opportunity for disadvantaged children and families across Wales. One of its key aims, is to secure a duty on local authorities to ensure sufficient opportunities for play for children in Wales.

For local authorities, providing sufficient opportunities for children's play will require audits across Wales made by professionals who understand children's play. If the ambitions of the Children and Families Measure are to make a positive impact on the experiences of children locally, in their communities, the need for investment in support for local planners is essential. The play sufficiency audits must provide the mechanism to measure play provision in terms of quality, not just quantity. Only when issues of quality in terms of space and time to play are consistently addressed will we begin to meet the play needs of our children.

The Institute of Welsh Affairs (IWA) report, *What are we doing to our Kids?* (commissioned by BBC Cymru Wales and published in March) examines some of the experiences of children growing up in Wales

compared with those of their parents and grandparents – particularly the relationships children have with others around them and children's play. It is no surprise that the report confirms that the freedom to play, or the loss of it, contributes to children's (and their parents' and grandparents') perception of their wellbeing.

The Welsh Assembly Government is working in partnership with the Wales United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Monitoring Group to develop a 5-year action plan for the promotion and implementation of the Concluding Observations 2008 (covered in *Play for Wales* Winter 2008) and children and young people's rights in Wales. At a conference in mid March delegates were asked to identify barriers and suggest the change needed to support all children to realise their right to play. All of the suggestions made at the conference are already contained within the national Play Policy Implementation Plan.

The IWA report provides some evidence that there is a significant way to go to translate the good sentiment of national policies and strategies into meaningful experiences for children in their own communities. We've spent long enough listening to what children and young people have to say about play. It's time to create an environment that supports the provision of sufficient time and space for children and young people to play every day in their own communities.

Marianne Mannello,
Assistant Director, Play Wales

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who contributed to this magazine – we couldn't do it without you. This issue of *Play for Wales*, as well as previous issues, is available to download from our website news section at www.playwales.org.uk



Legal matters!

Another step closer to play provision becoming a statutory duty in Wales

For many years there has been a legal duty placed on local authorities to provide for children's education within their area, but until recently children's play has not been seen as important enough to warrant the same kind of legislation.

In Spring 2008 we reported on a Legislative Competence Order (LCO) that was going through Parliament within which the National Assembly for Wales was seeking the power to place a duty on local authorities to provide for children's play. Before Christmas this LCO, on Social Welfare – Vulnerable Children and Child Poverty, gained royal approval. Here are extracts from paragraph sixty:

Local authority duties in respect of play opportunities for children

- (1) A local authority must assess the sufficiency of play opportunities in its area for children in accordance with regulations ...
 - (3) A local authority must secure sufficient play opportunities in its area for children, so far as reasonably practicable, having regard to its assessment under subsection (1) ...
 - (5) In performing its duties under this section, a local authority must have regard (among other things)
 - (a) to the needs of children who are disabled persons (within the meaning of section 1 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995)
 - (b) to the needs of children of different ages ...
- ... "play" includes any recreational activity; "sufficient", in relation to play opportunities, means sufficient having regard to quantity and quality.

A 'Children and Families Measure' was placed before the National Assembly on 2 March detailing the Assembly Government's proposals for legislation – which will be subject to further consultation and scrutiny over the next 3–6 months. Play Wales has been asked to provide evidence as part of the consultation. The next step will be to draft primary legislation – which will then have to return to the Houses of Parliament before it can become law.

What does this Measure mean to children's play in Wales?

The Children's Commissioner for Wales, Keith Towler, says, "This Measure is a significant step forward. A number of practitioners have, over the years, commented on the importance of play to children and young people's lives and this Measure indicates to me that policy makers have come to realise the significance of play as an essential part of a good childhood."

At Play Wales we hope that a statutory duty being placed on local authorities will 'raise their game' and see them collaborating with partners to achieve a more consistent implementation of strategy across Wales to meet the aims and aspirations of the national Play Policy.

Find out more at www.wales.gov.uk

Technical Advice Note Update

Updated advice for sport, recreation and other open spaces has been published by the Welsh Assembly Government.

Technical Advice Note (TAN) 16, 'Sport, Recreation and Open Space' is the latest TAN to be revised in a series of guidelines for communities, developers and local planning authorities in Wales, to help prepare local development plans and make decisions on planning applications.

The TAN 16 offers advice on planning for children and young people's play areas, stating:

'While formal, equipped play areas provide opportunities, these are not the only forms of provision which should be offered. Playable spaces, community woodland and

informal areas for play can provide opportunities for children to interact and gain the social, health and well-being benefits which come from opportunities for active, physical play.'

Find out more at <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/planning/policy/tans/tan16e/?lang=en>



Children as Researchers Conference



Funky Dragon recently held it's first ever conference for children aged six to eleven.

The Children as Researchers Conference was a culmination of months of work by children from all over Wales – eight schools and groups took part and have spent the

last four months working on a project of their choosing and researching an issue from their local area.

www.funkydragon.org

Go and Play – a new adventure playground in West Wales

Go and Play is a community group based in Pantyffynon in Carmarthenshire who, working with Communities First Pantyffynon and Carmarthenshire Youth Children's Association, had a vision to establish an adventure playground in their community.

Starting in 2006 with a feasibility study funded by the Welsh Development Agency and carried out by Play Wales, in Spring 2009 they have finally managed to purchase the land they needed.

The history of this project is published as an ongoing case study on Play Wales' website on the Play Places, Adventure Playgrounds pages www.playwales.org.uk

Congratulations to all of those involved – without your hard work and determination this would be a different story.

What are we doing to our kids?

The Institute of Welsh Affairs (IWA) has published a report *What are we doing to our kids?* The report, commissioned by BBC Cymru Wales for a season looking at childhood, was based on conversations with children and adults around Wales (from a Welsh medium school in rural North Wales, a Valleys school and a school in inner-city Cardiff).

The report includes a chapter dedicated to *Play and Freedom*. The children who took part in the survey were asked to draw their favourite indoor activities, and their favourite activities outside the house.

One group of children made it clear that technological devices have an important influence on their experience of play time inside the house. Items and activities referred to included television, computer games, Nintendo DS, PS2, listening to music, telephones, laptops, and games consoles such as Xbox 360, and Playstations. However, when asked to depict their favourite place to play, none of the group of children referred to the activities they had drawn inside the

house. In fact, they mentioned completely different things: mountains, a football pitch, streets, back gardens, and parks.

One child said:

'It's better when you can go out to play than when you're stuck inside on a nice day. It's not very nice.'

Play Wales has been involved in some aspects of advising the BBC and IWA.

Download the full report from the IWA website www.iwa.org.uk and bbc.co.uk/wales – has dedicated web pages for people to get in touch and get involved in the *What are we doing to our kids?* debate.



Good Childhood Report

The Good Childhood[®] Inquiry, co-ordinated by the Children's Society, is the UK's first independent national inquiry into childhood. The aim of the report from the Inquiry was to renew society's understanding of modern childhood and to 'inform, improve and inspire all our relationships with children'.

Children and young people who gave evidence talked about playing outside in ways that are active, such as building dens and running around with their friends. The report recommends a ban on all building on sports fields and open spaces where children play – which support the recommendations of the Welsh Assembly Government Play Policy Implementation Group made in 2004.

Find out more at www.childrensociety.org.uk and see Tim Gill's critique, 'The childhood report lacks insight' (Comment is Free, *The Guardian*, 4 February 2009).



£1.4 million to 'mend' children in Wales

A new Welsh Assembly Government-funded programme designed to help overweight and obese children manage their weight and become fitter, healthier and happier is now being rolled out across Wales.

The £1.4million scheme, Mind, Exercise, Nutrition ... Do it! (MEND) will target around 2,000 7-13 year olds and their families over the next three years. It's the first national scheme of this type for children of any country. By international standards Welsh children are comparatively more overweight or obese than in other nations.

Programme tips include: limiting screen time to no more than two hours a day; regular exercise; keeping active (including playing outdoors after school and at the weekend as often as possible); and walking or cycling to school.

Find out more at www.mendprogramme.org

Play-friendly Streets – taking a debate into the Senedd



Places to Go research has shown that between 1973 and 2006, the proportion of children playing out on the streets fell from 75 per cent to 15 per cent.

At the same time Assembly Members have been making calls to urgently address the shortage of affordable housing in Wales.

So in early March Sustrans (the sustainable transport charity) and Play Wales called on planning authorities in Wales to lead the UK in creating car free housing developments which would meet the play and ranging needs of children and young people.

The two charities worked together to organise a round table discussion

chaired by Jane Davidson AM, Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing (who was once the Minister responsible for children's play) and attended by housing contractors, architects and planners.

Lee Waters of Sustrans Cymru said, 'Too many urban areas are clogged by traffic when they could be safe public spaces where children can play safely outside their front doors and travel independently.'

Find the *Places to Go* research at www.playengland.org.uk



Play and the Plug

Whether we like it or not, playing and acquiring computer games has become an important part of the culture of many children and young people in the UK, yet there is little certainty within the play sector as to their relationship to play and play theory, or their value within play provision. Some play providers make an almost instinctive decision not to provide computer or electronic games, while we have heard of others who use them to attract children and young people to their setting. There are wider conflicting views on the effects and use of computer games on children and young people's behaviour, their wellbeing and their play.

At present there is no advice specifically aimed at play providers, so Play Wales has put together a briefing, based on current research, that covers a range of computer game related issues. We have also put together a statement of our position on computer games within play provision to help play providers to make decisions.

As part of this project, last autumn we asked around forty of Wales' play officers whether they saw a place for computer games within play provision. An informal poll suggested that the majority thought there wasn't – quality play provision can offer so much more than electronic toys – things that children can't access at home or school. This helped us to reach our own position.

Find our briefing sheet and position statement on *Play and the Plug* the information pages at www.playwales.org.uk. Here are excerpts adapted for this issue of *Play for Wales*:

Is it play?

There appears to be no such thing as 'electronic play,' it is neither a play type nor a play behaviour as defined in current literature. However, the play 'prop' provided by some computer games may support some play mechanisms.

The rationale for the Welsh Assembly Government Play Policy (2002) says:

As currently understood a child's behaviour is considered as play when several of the following criteria are evident. Play behaviour is variously: spontaneous, the result of a biological drive, first hand experience, goalless, where the child is in control of the content and intent ...

Many of us understand play to be something that encompasses first hand experiences and there are those who believe that virtual gaming is a poor substitute for 'real life' play. Imagine, for instance, the range of physical sensations, skills and emotions involved in having a snowboard race, compared with those involved in playing a virtual snowboarding game – the fun of swinging next to a friend in the park as compared to that of swinging in a virtual environment. What happens within a game is not meant or understood to be a substitute for real life (even for some disabled children or disadvantaged children for whom

it might be impossible to experience the activities they can be part of on screen) but sometimes children's immersion in a game can shut out real life experiences and choices.

Ask the children what they want ...

Manufacturers spend millions of pounds promoting and marketing consoles and games to children and young people, who naturally respond. [By October 2007 Nintendo Corporation was Japan's third most valuable company thanks to sales of DS and Wii consoles and games (Reuters Monday 15 October, 2007).]





When we consult with children and young people we need to take this factor into account.

The Playwork Principles tell us, *'the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas.'* The sale of consoles and games is an adult agenda and we need to be aware that there is a difference between children's play needs (what theory, experience, training, observation and reflection tell us they need within the play setting) and their play preferences (what may have been advertised to children as being 'cool,' 'exciting' or something that 'everybody else has got').

In other words we need to be aware that children respond to market and peer pressure (just as we do) but they may lack wider experience of what might be available.

They can only ask for what they know.

What they ask for may not be in their best interests in terms of the choice of a wide range of 'hands on' play experiences. Sometimes we have to use our judgment and say that we know best because we have more experience and a better idea of all the available possibilities that can extend children's play.

Compensation

A play setting compensates children for lack of opportunity and access to environments that support a wide range of choices for play – many children have access to computer games in other places. Where children don't have

access to computer games at home, many play in schools, public libraries and in friend's houses.

It might be assumed that there is less ownership of computer games among financially poorer socio-economic groups, however, without research this is hard to prove and there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that this assumption might not be correct ...

The British are remarkably effective in disguising their poverty ... (a journalist found)... a children's bedroom with the latest electronic games, so the kids didn't feel ashamed at school, but with a mattress on the floor being the only piece of furniture. (Reporting poverty in the UK, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2008)

Some parents will prioritise spending on consumer goods that elevate or boost the social status of their children within their peer group, by 'going without', by borrowing or by neglecting other household needs.

Play Wales' Position

Computer games are part of many children's lives – and many children have access to them every day if they want to play that way. Computer games need to be part of a wide range

of every day choices of play experiences and opportunities for children. They might be seen as one element of a 'balanced diet' of play with equal importance being put on active, physical play, playing with the elements, and all the other types and behaviours of play that all children need in their every day lives.

Some children are deprived of a range of play experiences because they spend most of their free time playing computer games indoors. It is the place of play provision to offer an environment rich in possibilities for play that provides children with what they may lack elsewhere in their lives. This is as much true for disabled children as it is for non-disabled children, who are facilitated by the playwork approach to socialise and play and make the most of the play environment in their own way.

Fixed play equipment manufacturers have started to market interactive electronic features for outdoor play areas. Electronic play equipment is expensive both in terms of capital costs and maintenance, it may provide marginally more play value than traditional fixed play equipment, but neither can provide the play value of a rich play environment that changes with the seasons, has many loose parts and a wealth of possibilities for manipulation and interaction.

Very careful consideration is needed before computer games are included in play provision. As adults we need to examine our motives, work out how we will manage the risks involved, and think about how computer games might influence the rhythm and growth of play within the play setting. Our most important consideration is children's play and how it might be affected by the introduction of computer games.

Play providers who have read this paper say that it gives a balanced perspective and will help others to make informed decisions.

Download *Play and the Plug* from the information pages at www.playwales.org.uk

We asked Bob Hughes, a writer and researcher on play and playwork what he thinks about this issue ...

'Is there a place for computer games in play provision?'

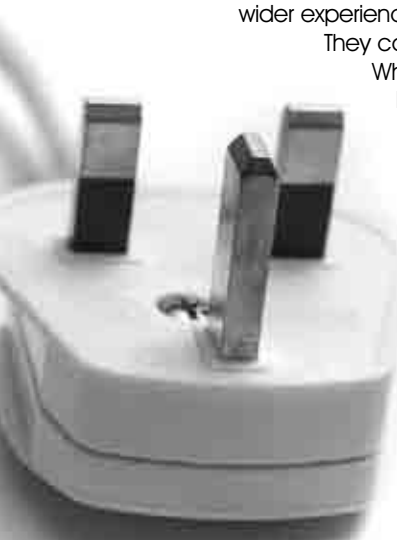
The other weekend my grandson came to stay. During the day there was an event going on by the river. We all went, but it soon became apparent that for him, surrounded by adult's backsides, cold and not particularly interested, his GameBoy was more attractive.

He put his mac on the ground and sat there clicking away, while the adults watched the event. When it finished we all left and he put the game away.

Computer games are not a myth, they are a real part of the child's ludic ecology. If children are offered real diversity and novelty in their play environment most of them will normally opt for that, most of the time.

It's not a matter of whether, it's how much.

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On outdoor electronic play equipment

Mike Hall, Principal Parks, Playgrounds and Playing Fields Officer for Denbighshire County Council, shares his experience of the electronic playground equipment installed at one of the county's play areas last year.

In the Twenty First Century we are all looking at ways to encourage children and young people to be more active and lead a more healthy lifestyle, to do this we need to encompass (in the right location/environment) modern technology which children and young people can be in tune with.

What the equipment does is encourage users to move between various stations causing them to stretch, bend and twist all parts of their bodies. It does this through a voice command – the user is instructed to move around 'inside' the framework and each correct action scores points. User(s) aim to beat their last score – shown on a digital display box. The games allow for single or multiple user games with all aspects being recorded electronically and it is powered by a solar panel. Scores can be uploaded to the internet by the user, who can see how their performance compares with others.

I believe there is a future for modern technology in play. The use of the new interactive play unit in one of our parks is showing that young people are of the same opinion. In fact, when the new unit is out of action we get complaints and queries asking when it will be back in service – unlike when one of the traditional play equipment items is disabled.

The users of the new unit range in age and numbers. You could say that traditional equipment also does this, but what is different here is that the new equipment can:

- tell us the numbers of users
- the games they play

- the time spent on the equipment
- tell us the scores of the games played

Just as with any other static play item or piece of equipment, the unit also:

- allows the user to choose the game they want to play
- encourages social interaction
- helps develop physical skills
- positively encourages activity
- educates, trains thought and mental processes

Before dismissing these items and their use of modern technology, play providers and traditionalists must look at traditional equipment and ask how much of this does all of these things?

The only drawback of this equipment is that it does not fit in to the traditional concepts, and with a push towards the provision of natural play and making use of more localised open space, it is in my opinion only appropriate if located in more central and larger play sites.

Since we installed the unit we know that the item has been in use daily over the last year and was in regular use over the Christmas and New Year break. We also know that several different games have been played on it and users have tried cheating to increase their scores. The unit complies with the Disability Discrimination

Act in that it is accessible and there are specific games for those who may be wheelchair bound.

The children and young people I have talked to have thoroughly enjoyed their experience of the system and many of these keep returning to it and actively participating in using it rather than sitting around watching others.

All in all I have been very pleased with the uptake of this new play innovation and would very much like to see similar units located within my main play areas across Denbighshire.



Photo: Playdale



Photo: Play Wales

Sam Parry, Area Green Space Plan Project Officer for Bristol Parks, was one of the first people to benefit from a CABE space scholarship that allowed him to visit inspirational outdoor play provision around Europe. He had the following comments about electronic play outdoors:

During a meeting with a playground manufacturer in their headquarters in Denmark I was shown a prototype for their latest play equipment – essentially a metal frame with knobs on. What made the equipment special was the fact that it was ‘electronic’ – it made noises and you could hit it.

This is apparently part of an effort amongst play manufacturers to tackle childhood obesity and get children outside, away from their computer consoles. This particular piece of equipment is often compared to the popular plastic toy *Bop-it*. Unfortunately, just like *Bop-it*, it soon loses its appeal. There are only so many times you can have fun hitting a big metal frame, even if you

can apparently ‘load your scores on to a website!’.

In fact, of all the play equipment I saw in Europe, the most inspirational was also the least technical – piles of wood and nails. Teenagers in Berlin were encouraged to build huts from scratch in public parks - an exercise that encouraged them to be outdoors, to use teamwork, and it was also creative, physically demanding, mentally stimulating and rewarding. Wood and nails and the cost of a few hours per week of playwork or youthwork time can be bought for slightly less than the £20,000 needed to purchase an interactive outdoor play item, and they do not need a watt of electricity to be used.

Meanwhile, reports suggest that it hasn’t taken long for children using the Danish equipment to undo years of scientific research by Loughborough University. Children are using the art of teamwork to position one child on each button, getting the maximum score without moving an inch ...

Our survey says

As part of the research for *Play and the Plug* we produced a questionnaire to distribute to children and young people across Wales asking for their views and use of computer games.

We are working with both English and Welsh medium primary and secondary schools in Prestatyn, Merthyr, Aberystwyth, Swansea and Cardiff.

Some of the results will be published as part of our *Play and the Plug* briefing sheet and position statement. We are currently collating the information – more in-depth results will be published on our website in the near future – keep an eye out in coming weeks.

Thank you to all the schools for your help.



Primary school children completing our survey



Busting Computer Myths

In 2007 Nintendo was the third most valuable company in Japan thanks to sales of DS and Wii consoles and games. Manufacturers have enormous advertising budgets and make extravagant claims to sell their products. At the same time there are those who are suspicious of computer games and see them as detrimental to children and to society. Here we take some of the common perceptions and claims and look at them in a little more depth.

Physically interactive computer games make our children fitter

A study published in the British Medical Journal in February 2007¹ claims that playing with a Wii console could have health benefits. Researchers at Liverpool John Moores University compared the energy expenditure of young people playing sedentary and 'active' computer games and found 'Wii-ers' burned 60 calories an hour more than those playing traditional computer games. However the researchers concluded:

The energy used when playing active Wii Sport games was not of high enough intensity to contribute towards the recommended daily amount of exercise in children.

Playing computer games damages children's brain development

A study carried out in Scottish schools concluded that a daily dose of computer games could boost maths attainment². Learning and Teaching Scotland, the main organisation for the development of the curriculum, analysed the effect of a 'brain training' game.

It also found improvements in pupils' concentration and behaviour and even found improvements in absence and lateness in some classes.

Conversely, another study involving 67 ten-year-olds found no evidence to support claims that brain training improves cognitive function and may, in fact, harm it³. Professor of cognitive psychology Alain Lieury at the University of Rennes, Brittany said, 'The Nintendo DS is a technological jewel. As a game it's fine. But it is charlatanism to claim that it is a scientific test.' Helping children with homework, reading, playing Scrabble or Su Doku,

or watching documentaries matched or beat the benefits of brain training games.

Playing violent video games makes children aggressive

There is a view that the so-called negative effects of playing violent computer games could actually be beneficial in an educational context. For example, violent computer games can provide a useful outlet to vent frustration. They provide a safe outlet for aggressive tendencies and can be useful in managing aggression. This view can be supported by the catharsis theory expounded by Aristotle, the hypothesis being that observing aggressive play has a relaxing effect by channelling latent aggression and therefore has a positive effect on behaviour⁴.

However, the Byron Review (www.dcsf.gov.uk/byronreview) suggests that 'the evidence of harm in relation to the internet and video games ... I have found that a search for direct cause and effect in this area is often too simplistic, not least because it would in many cases be unethical to do the necessary research'.

It's so dangerous for children to go out these days surely it's less risky when they're online or playing on computer games

The Byron Review suggests that we approach online and computer games and gaming in much the same way that we would any other aspect of risky play – the dangers are similar to those in the 'outside' world (emotional risk taking, predatory adults, bullying, potential exposure to inappropriate aggressive or sexual images and language). 'As we increasingly keep our children at home because of fears for their safety outside – in what some see as a "risk-

averse culture" – they will play out their developmental drives to socialise and take risks in the digital world'.

According to a recent study⁵, conducted by Professor Dafna Lemish from the Department of Communication at Tel Aviv University, it was found that parents don't know what their kids are doing on the internet. Seventy three per cent of children surveyed said they gave out personal information on the internet. The parents of the same children believed that only four per cent of their children did so. The same children were also asked if they had been exposed to pornography while surfing, or if they had made face-to-face contact with strangers that they had met online. Thirty six per cent from the high school group admitted to meeting with a stranger they had met online. Nearly forty per cent of these children admitted to speaking with strangers regularly. Fewer than nine per cent of the parents knew that their children had been meeting with strangers, engaging in what could be viewed as very risky behaviour.

577 children went to hospital in 2006 suffering from Repetitive Strain Injury, or RSI, a group of conditions which normally affect assembly line workers and people working with computers. This is an increase of thirty five per cent from 1999. Comparatively, these figures, collated by hospitals in England, show the number of children treated for falling out of trees dropped by thirty six per cent between 1999 and 2006 – from 1,823 to 1,163⁶.

¹ Graves, Stratton, Ridgers and Cable, **Energy Expenditure in adolescents playing new generation computer games**, Research Institute for Sport and Exercises Sciences, Liverpool John Moores University, cited in British Medical Journal, December 2007.

² **Dr Kawashima's Brain Training**, Learning and Teaching Scotland, September 2008. www.ltscotland.org.uk/ictineducation/gamesbasedlearning/sharingpractice/braintraining/introduction

³ Schmidgall, A. J., **Effect Of Violent Video Games On Aggression**, Department of Psychology, Missouri Western State University, July 2007.

⁴ Bensley, L., VanEenwyk, J. (2000). **Video Games and Real-life Aggression: A Review of the Literature**. Olympia, WA: Washington State Department of Health Office of Epidemiology.

⁵ Science Daily (website), **Generation Gap? 'Online Gap' Widens Divide Between Parents and Children**, 5 February 2008.

⁶ Telegraph Correspondent, **'Consoles harm more than tree-climbing'**, *The Daily Telegraph*, 19 April 2008.



Sticks and stones

'Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me'.

Dr Erin Heerey of Bangor University would certainly agree with the sentiment of this old nursery rhyme.

She argues that the use of 'playground nicknames' and insults at a young age improves social

skills and helps children develop a sense of humour and that they are an 'essential part of life' and should not be confused with bullying. Dr Heerey also said 'playfighting' gave pupils the chance to tell

the difference between real and pretend violence.

For more information:
www.bangor.ac.uk/news/full.php?id=753

Getting this magazine

Changes in funding mean that in the next financial year we plan to return to publishing *Play for Wales* three times a year – once each school term.

At the same time we are trying to reduce the number of paper copies we send out – to save trees and the polar bears' habitat and to help us cut costs. We won't stop sending out paper copies

but we hope you can help us by choosing to receive our magazine electronically. Play Wales members receive a paper copy as part of their membership package.

Play for Wales is available to download at www.playwales.org.uk in the news section, or we can add you to our list of people who receive it as an electronic magazine (please email info@playwales.org.uk)

Using research to evidence the benefits of playwork

Helen Elton, former Director of PlayRight, the play association for Swansea and Neath Port Talbot, has a new role ...

You may believe wholeheartedly that restrictions on children's play make playwork vital. But can you prove it? It is part of my task to support gathering evidence to provide the proof.

I am Play Research Portfolio Development Fellow - a long title for a very small link in the Children and Young People's Research Network, one of ten thematic research networks in Clinical Research Collaboration Cymru, funded by the Wales Office of Research and Development. It is my job to support

and develop play research across Wales, hosted by The Centre for Child Research at Swansea University.

Play projects are competing with other types of projects for funding, which is increasingly targeted at evidence-based practice. The difficulty is that although there is a widespread belief that play is essential, and there are theories and philosophies on which playworkers base their practice, it can be hard to find evidence of the value of playwork's particular approach.

As part of the role, I am developing a

Play Research Network and am putting together a list of people who are interested in play research. At present it exists as an email contact list that I use to disseminate research findings and snippets of news. As it grows, the Network will organise seminars, link researchers, publicise research, and support the development of proposals for research funding.

If you want to know more or be involved in some way, please email me h.elton@swansea.ac.uk or ring me on 01792 602464.



Potential in Playwork – Learning and Growing

We can nurture quality provision for children's play by supporting a well-informed workforce that learns and grows.

The promotion of continuing professional development (CPD) for people working in the playwork sector is an objective of the National Centre for Education and Training in Playwork (Playwork Wales).

The Welsh Assembly Government defines CPD as an ongoing and planned learning and development process that contributes to work based and personal development ... enabling practitioners to expand and fulfil their potential.

Providing for CPD not only supports good employment practice and Welsh Assembly Government plans, but also meets the aspirations of the Playwork Principles – which say that playworkers need to keep up to date with research and knowledge related to children's play and playwork.

A supportive strategy

Playwork is relatively new as a qualified and trained profession, as are many of the structures now in place to develop a quality workforce. So as part of ongoing work, Playwork Wales has drafted a strategy for continuing professional development in the playwork sector. The aim is to support all those of us delivering play services to be the best we can be. It is intended that the Strategy shows how we can:

- professionalise and up-skill the playwork workforce
- increase the supply of skilled and qualified playworkers
- promote collaboration and cross-sector mobility within the children's workforce (i.e. all those people who

are trained to work with children – from teachers to childminders).

What does it mean to playworkers?

Adopting a CPD strategy is expected to help playworkers to:

- share knowledge and expertise and help to improve understanding and skills in line with the Playwork Principles
- improve the quality of playwork delivery which in turn can support and enhance children's enjoyment, confidence and self-esteem
- use time effectively and be involved and motivated to improve the quality of understanding and practice

Getting it right – having a say

The Strategy will only work if it meets the needs of practicing playworkers. It is also very important to us that the Strategy supports employers to make the most of the huge potential offered within the playwork workforce.

So whether you are a playworker or an employer, a trainer or an educator, your say is important to us. We are keen to know your comments and observations on the document so that we can make it as user-friendly and supportive as possible.

Please go to the training pages at www.playwales.org.uk to download the strategy (or contact our office 029 2048 6050 or workforce@playwales.org.uk to ask for a hard copy). Please send us your views by 23 May 2009.



Achieving CPD

The best way to ensure continuing professional development takes place is for a worker and their manager to draw up a learning programme to ensure that their education and training needs are met. This process is likely to involve reflective activity – both playworkers and managers thinking about areas of work where an individual may be able to improve or where they need more knowledge or skills - supporting individual needs and improving professional practice. The progress of the programme can then be monitored and adjusted through individual support sessions and annual appraisals.

A CPD learning programme can be short or long, as long as it supports the development of knowledge, skills and understanding related to an individual's job.

What is CPD?

Most of us are aware that training courses (whether they lead to a qualification or not) are part of continuing professional development and these are usually the first items planned into a learning programme.

However, a learning programme can also include attendance at key meetings, seminars, networking events and conferences as well as the provision of mentoring, or observation and feedback on working practice.



CPD an example ...

Mel Welch joined Play Wales in 2006 and has been a member of the Workforce Development Team for the past two years. Although her work is primarily administration and project management – she is now our Workforce Development Co-ordinator – Mel has experience of working on playschemes and a keen interest in playwork. She has recently enrolled as a part-time distance-learning student working towards a graduate diploma in Playwork at the University of Gloucester.

Find out more about Mel's course at: www.glos.ac.uk/courses/postgraduate/plp/Pages/default.aspx

Good luck to Mel Welch, our Workforce Development Co-ordinator

We would like to wish Mel the best of luck on her new adventure as she moves to Japan at the end of March.

Mel will be much missed at Play Wales for her sense of humour, intelligence, creativity, hard work and her commitment to the paperwork challenge of P³.



Playwork Wales Update

Successful numbers:

Fifteen learners have successfully completed their L20 Training 'Supporting Competence in the Workplace.' What is the L20? The L20 is an award similar to the A2, it is for Assessors who assess by observing people in their workplace.

A huge 1,550 learners have undertaken Playwork: Principles into Practice (P³) training since piloting began in 2006 - and 200 of these

have successfully achieved their P³ level 2 qualification.

Three assessors are undertaking their V1 Verification qualification. This equips them to ensure quality and it is aimed at those involved in training, assessment, verification and management of training activities.

Playwork professionals in Wales have been offered the opportunity to undertake Basic Skills training – which includes Maths and English or Welsh - in partnership with SkillsActive, Basic Skills Cymru and Play Wales.

A career as a playworker? Find out more ...

Attracting new playworkers into the profession is sometimes a bit of a challenge for employers. Not many people know about playwork or consider it as a career option. We think it's time they did!

Playwork Wales has produced a booklet for jobseekers, students, employers and careers guidance services, that explains playwork, playwork training and education, and potential careers pathways. Written in plain language and illustrated with photographs of children and playworkers around Wales, we hope this will be a useful and productive resource.

The first step is for Playwork Wales to distribute the booklet free to careers services, colleges and job centres. At the same time GAVO Creative Play Project has purchased 500 booklets for distribution in and around Caerphilly to support their playworker recruitment. It



will soon be available to download from the Play Wales website training pages.

A big thank you to all those who have helped us with this project – your photos and quotes have made the words come alive!



Events

The State of the Child - Cardiff School of Social Sciences

23 April - 4 June 2009 (Thursdays, 16:10 - 18:00)

Series of lectures on the theme

The State of the Child

www.cf.ac.uk

Down to Earth - centre for practical sustainability and natural building

April - September 2009

Down to Earth - is running a number of building courses, from earth oven construction to straw bale building, that may be of interest to people working outside with children.

Gower, near Bishopston.

www.downtoearthproject.org.uk

Places for Play Study Tour

28 - 30 April, 26 - 28 May, 9 - 11 June 2009

Stirling

www.playlink.org

The Spirit of Adventure Play

6 - 7 May 2009

The Spirit of Adventure Play is a lively, relaxed and challenging conference for adventure playground workers and playworkers who believe in the ethos of adventure playgrounds.

Holiday Inn, Cardiff

www.playwales.org.uk

Childhood regained - Early Education Annual National Conference 2009

8 - 9 May 2009

University of Wales Swansea

www.early-education.org.uk

The Power of Play to Help and Heal: Promoting Development through Play Therapy

27 - 28 June 2009

Birmingham

www.bapt.uk.com

Playday 2009 - Make Time!

5 August 2009

www.playday.org.uk

The Beauty of Play: The Wildness of Play

4 - 6 September 2009

Stone, Staffordshire

www.ludemos.co.uk

Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation Guide

David Ball, Tim Gill and Bernard Spiegat

This guide is written for those responsible for managing play provision, and for those involved in designing and maintaining such provision.



This guide shows how play providers can replace current risk assessment practice with an approach to risk management that takes into account the benefits to children and young people of challenging play experiences, as well as the risks.

This guide is based on the Play Safety Forum's position statement Managing Risk in Play Provision (Play Safety Forum, 2002). It starts from the position that,

while outside expertise and advice are valuable, the ultimate responsibility for making decisions rests with the provider.

You can download a copy on the Play England website: www.playengland.org.uk or order a hard copy from the DCSF publications distributor www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications or telephone 0845 602 2260.

The Health and Safety Executive has a Myth of the Month page on their website. March's myth of the month is: Health and safety rules take the adventure out of playgrounds: www.hse.gov.uk/myth/index.htm

FAREWELL

Our able Finance Assistant, Agii Griffiths has recently moved to a new job with Consumer Focus. We already miss her cheeky smile and lovely cups of tea.

