

Play for Wales

Play news and briefing from the national organisation for play

Summer 2009



PLAY
- rain or shine



www.playwales.org.uk



Contents

page

Editorial	2
News	3-5
The Natural Way to Play	6-7
Play and the weather	8-9
Weather Therapy	10
The Ingredients of Seasoned Play	11
Workforce Development	12-13
Events and Funding	14

Play for Wales is published by Play Wales three times a year.

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

ISSN: 1755 9243

The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of Play Wales. We reserve the right to edit for publication. We do not endorse any of the products or events advertised in or with this publication.

This publication is printed on paper produced from sustainable forests.

Designed and printed by
 Carrick
 Tel: 01443 843520
 E-mail: sales@carrickdp.co.uk

Editorial

Never mind the weather? Weather conditions (and our attitudes towards them) make a big difference to the quality of children's play experience. It is a fair bet that (for no good reason that we can think of) even with the changes in thinking arising from the Foundation Phase, the majority of school children in Wales are still discouraged from playing out during 'wet' playtime.

When snow fell in February familiar places became fantastic newly-presented play opportunities; traffic was slowed, if not stopped, and attitudes towards children playing out were magically transformed. The same happens when the sun comes out. In sunshine our mood lifts and everyone, including our children take the opportunity to spend time and play outside.

We need to make the 'outside' the natural place for children to be and encourage them to get out and play whatever the weather – it is not the conditions, but our attitude that influences what is possible. As the well known philosopher, Billy Connolly says: there's no such thing as the wrong weather . . . it's just the wrong clothes.

Over the past decade it has been proved that we all benefit from spending time outside in 'natural' surroundings – to encourage an appreciation of our environment, to foster emotional and physical resilience and because outside can be a richer place to play. In schools and early years settings, the Foundation Phase and Eco Schools initiative both recognise the wealth of learning opportunities that the outdoor natural environment can offer. Children need to know the signs, sensations and nature of weather – it cannot be taught, it has to be experienced – and different weather provides ever-changing opportunities for play. Giving a child a chance to play in summer rain costs nothing and the memory may stay with them forever.

The world's climate is changing (Australian colleagues within the International Play Association report that they can no longer support children in experiencing open fires or large-scale water play due to years of drought) and we know that the children of today will need to adapt to different weather conditions in the future. We can foster the necessary flexibility and resilience by providing all-weather outdoor play experiences now. We can also plan ahead to make sure that places to play in our neighbourhoods will support play no matter what the depth of rainfall or the strength of the wind and sun.

A ray of sunshine

The economic and political weather is changing daily – we might say that these are turbulent times with strong gusts coming in from the East. However, among the doom-laden forecasts, a ray of sunshine has burst through the storm clouds to shine on a greater choice of quality playwork training in Wales. Playwork: Principles into Practice (P³ – the Level 2 playwork qualification we have developed over the past three years) can continue to run for the next year thanks to financial assistance from Welsh Assembly Government (find out more on our Workforce Development pages). We are extremely grateful to the Minister, Jane Hutt AM, for her recognition of the unique importance of P³ and her clear commitment to quality playwork in Wales.

... and, we have some evidence that economic and political turbulence and financial drought may be beginning to have an impact on play provision in Wales, so we have put together tips and briefings to support this year's Playday theme *Make Time!* in the hope that it will support the Welsh play sector in weathering financial storms. They will appear on our website www.playwales.org.uk between now and Playday on 5 August.

Mike Greenaway,
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



Play Wales North Office Closes

We are very sad to announce that our North Wales office will close on 30 June 2009. We also deeply regret that we have to say farewell to a much loved and valued member of staff, Annette Hennessy, who has worked for us so loyally in Prestatyn for the past seven years.

This has been a very difficult decision to make, it has involved our Trustees and management team, who have evaluated the financial and strategic situation.

Please see our website for further details.

Active Play Research

New research recently published in the *International Journal of Pediatric Obesity* found that regular amounts of 'sporadic' activity in children were equally as beneficial as longer exercise sessions.

The researchers, from the University of Exeter's School of Sport and Health Sciences, believe their findings have positive implications, as children are more likely to engage in short bursts of activity than complete longer bouts of exercise.

'If future research backs up our findings, we would do better to encourage young children to do what they do naturally,

rather than trying to enforce long exercise sessions on them. This could be a useful way of improving enjoyment and sustainability of healthy physical activity levels in childhood.'

For more information go to:

www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~db%3Dall~content%3Da910209423~tab%3Dcontent

Childhood and Nature Survey



A survey conducted for *Natural England*, as part of its *One Million Children Outdoors* campaign found that children today spend less time in natural places, and enjoy less unsupervised natural play than previous generations.

The majority of children (over 70%) have the perception that they are supervised wherever they play.

Download *Childhood And Nature: A Survey On Changing Relationships With Nature Across Generations* at www.naturalengland.org.uk or phone 0114 241 8920

Legal Matters

Stepping closer to play provision becoming a statutory duty.

In the last issue of *Play for Wales* we reported that as part of the Proposed Children and Families (Wales) Measure play provision is another step closer to becoming a statutory duty in Wales.

Play Wales and other organisations including Children in Wales and the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) have now presented oral evidence to the Legislation Committee as part of the consultation process.

All the Committee's agendas, papers and transcripts can be found on the National Assembly for Wales website: www.assemblywales.org

We'll keep you posted on further developments in the news section of our website: www.playwales.org.uk



Climbing Higher – Creating an Active Wales

Welsh Assembly Government has launched a consultation document *Climbing Higher: Creating an Active Wales – A 5 Year Strategic Action Plan*.

As part of *Our Healthy Future*, the Welsh Assembly Government strategic approach to improve the quality and length of life, the document recognises the importance of having a built environment that supports people to be active and having access to green spaces.

One of the priorities for supporting children and young people to 'live active lives, and become active adults' is 'ensuring that there is access to opportunities for quality play.'

Have your say

Respond to the consultation by email (before 31 July 2009): lifestyles@wales.gsi.gov.uk or telephone: 029 2082 6168

Download the document (including a 'child friendly' version) and consultation questions at:

wales.gov.uk/consultations/healthsocialcare/active/?lang=en



Word Travels

Our *Spirit of Adventure Play* conference draws all kinds of delegates from across the UK and a growing crowd of sparky play people from within Wales.

This year two British colleagues who work with Forces children in Brunei (a small Sultanate, bordering the South China Sea and Malaysia) found funding to be able to attend the conference – and they were so impressed they are starting to raise money to return next year.

'Travelling from Brunei to Wales to attend such an excellent and informative event was well worthwhile.'

International Play Association (IPA)

We would like to encourage everyone and anyone who has an interest in children's play to join the England Wales and Northern Ireland branch of the International Play Association.

The next IPA triennial world conference will take place in Wales in July 2011 – your support and involvement will be crucial in showcasing the best that Wales has to offer for children and their play.

Find out more and download a membership form at www.ipa-ewni.org.uk



Estyn Llaw appoints its first North Wales Officer

Estyn Llaw, a scheme that gives practical support and advice to voluntary and community groups wishing to increase their use of the Welsh language has appointed their first North Wales Officer.

Contact Mari Wiliam in St Asaph on: 01745 585120 or ymhol@estynllaw.org



Play Development Work – meeting the needs of all children

This summer Play Wales and Menter Iaith Cymru worked together to organise a seminar for Wales' play development workers and workers from organisations promoting Welsh language.

We looked at the features of quality play provision and how to strategically and practically meet the language (and other) needs of playing children.

But most of all we got people talking to each other ... in Welsh as well as English.



Make Time for Play – 365 Days a Year!

This year's Playday campaign theme is *Make Time!*

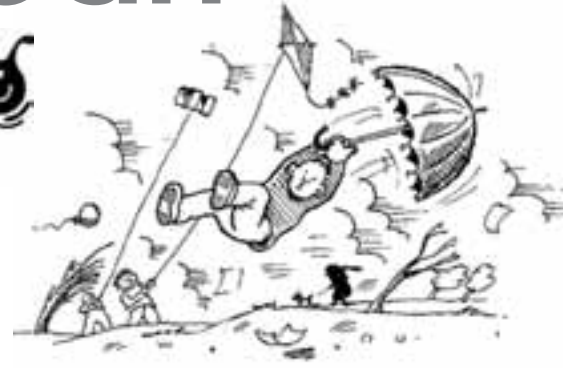
It's time for play. We have already consulted children about what they value and what they want in their lives – every time the answer comes back that they want more chances to play and good places for playing.

We already know how beneficial playing is to all children in terms of their health, resilience and life chances ... and more. It's time to stop asking children questions and give them what they ask for in a meaningful way.

Local and national politicians, planners, highway engineers, people involved in running and servicing schools, housing providers and developers, are some of those whose decisions can have a serious impact on play. A street designed with play opportunities in mind, a school built with thought as to how the space (both inside and outside) might support play, sustaining budgets for or extending play services – all of these have a beneficial long-term impact on children and their families.

Children's psychological and physical nature means almost every moment of their lives is spent seeking out opportunities to play – everywhere that

they are or could be is somewhere to play. So play is something that cuts across most political agendas and policy areas. We need to take time to raise it in every arena – on behalf of all our children.



Commissioner backs Playday

Keith Towler, Children's Commissioner for Wales, says:

I am a firm believer that giving children the freedom to play is a key responsibility for us adults. Somehow we take children's play for granted but we need to make sure children of all ages get the time and freedom to enjoy themselves, to have fun and to learn so many life skills along the way.

Playday Resources

At Play Wales we think this is also a good time to provide tips and briefings for play providers about how to argue the case and gain support for play provision. Find the Make time! materials on our website:

www.playwales.org.uk

Getting this magazine

Changes in funding mean that we are now only 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)



The Natural Way to Play

David Sobel, New England based author and researcher on children's play and the natural environment, recently spoke at our *Spirit of Adventure Play* Conference in Cardiff. Here are edited extracts from his book *Childhood and Nature: Design Principles for Educators*.

If we want children to flourish we need to give them time to connect with nature – and love the Earth before we ask them to save it. My overarching goal over the past thirty years has been to look at the relationship between children and nature from the bottom up. I'm interested in figuring out how to cultivate relationships between children and 'wild nature' in their own backyards ... hiding in trees precedes saving trees.

Through conducting observations of children in the out-of-doors in all kinds of settings, at all ages and in a number of different cultures, I've noticed certain recurrent patterns emerge. Regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or ecosystem, children play in similar ways when they have free time in nature ... and I have identified seven play motifs.

Spend time at a safe, woodsy playground and you'll find children making dens and special places, playing hunting and gathering games, shaping small worlds, developing relationships with animals, constructing adventures, ascending into fantasies, and following paths and figuring out short cuts.

Just by following the child's lead in building nature relationships, we can translate these motifs into design principles. In other words, we can use the principles of special places, hunting and gathering, creating small worlds and the others as design components for any place where children might play.

The design principles are not developmental and, as a result function at right angles to the developmental stages – they run through all of them. To take special places as an example, in early childhood, they are constructed out of cushions in the living room and then move to under the porch. In middle childhood, special places are dens out in the woods or up in a tree. In adolescence, the special place might be a local clubhouse, or it might become the coffeehouse downtown. Each design principle is manifest in a different way in each developmental stage.

Principle 1: Adventure

Children should stalk, balance, jump and scamper through the natural world. A physical challenge component speaks directly to children via the mind/body link.

Adventures mean you don't know what's going to happen when you start out. You're going to get off the trail, do some sneaking around, surprise someone or get surprised, and you're going to take a few risks. Taking children into caves, going on

blindfold walks, exploring alleyways and dark basements, calling up people you don't know on the telephone – adventures can take lots of forms. But I have a preference for the Narnia version where you start in the everyday and wind up in the exotic.

Principle 2: Fantasy and Imagination

Young children live in their imaginations.

I ran across a British study a few years ago that clarified this for me. *The Development of Imagination: The Private Worlds of Childhood* by David Cohen and Stephen MacKeith (1991) is their description of children's private imaginary worlds, which they call 'paracosms.' Paracosms are elaborate fantasy creations – imaginary worlds created by individuals or small groups of children. They tend to emerge around age seven or eight, flourish up through ages thirteen or fourteen, and then gradually subside. Narnia has its roots in a paracosmic world created by C.S. Lewis and his brother during their childhoods.

Principle 3: Animal Allies

Children feel an inherent empathy with wild and domestic animals. With some, their first impulse is to pick them up, hold them close, take care of them and 'become' them. Others evoke implicit fear and avoidance. Eventually, they may want to hunt them, cut them open and eat them, but that comes a bit later. In his book *Ark*, Paul Shepard suggests that these strong feelings towards animals in early and middle childhood are indicative of our evolutionary heritage as hunters and gatherers.

Principle 4: Maps and Paths

Finding shortcuts, figuring out what's around the next bend, following a map to a secret event. Children have an inborn desire to explore local geographies.

There tends to be a getting-to-know-the-neighbourhood phase of childhood – it corresponds with the kinds of challenges experienced by children in hunting and gathering cultures at this age. As young hunters and gatherers moved from the confines of the camp or village into the bush, their mastery of geographic knowledge was crucial to their survival. Thus, a biologically programmed fascination with identifying animal signs, tracking animals, understanding trail and drainage networks, calculating shortcuts comes down to even modern day children.



Principle 5: Special Places

Almost everyone remembers a fort, den, tree house or hidden corner in the back of a cupboard. Especially between ages eight and eleven, children like to find and create places where they can hide away and retreat into their own found or constructed spaces.

In describing optimal play spaces for children, landscape architect Simon Nicholson articulated the theory of 'loose parts' indicating that, 'In any environment, both the degree of inventiveness and creativity, and the possibility of discovery, are directly proportional to the number and kind of variables in it.' In other words, children like play settings where there are lots of things to do and lots of 'loose parts' to use to create new structures or be transformed into horses, swords, kitchenware or furniture. The flotsam and jetsam of driftwood piles on the beach are to den building as lego® bricks are to designing futuristic space jets.

Principle 6: Small Worlds

From sand pits to dolls' houses to model train sets, children love to create miniature worlds that they can play inside. Through facilitating the creation of miniature representations of ecosystems, or neighbourhoods, we help children conceptually grasp the big picture. The creation of small worlds provides a concrete vehicle for understanding abstract ideas.

Small worlds work wonders for children. They provide the same kind of emotional security as islands provide for holidaymakers. The world is simplified, knowable and easily controlled.

Principle 7: Hunting and Gathering

From a genetic perspective, we are still hunting and gathering organisms. Gathering and collecting anything compels us; searching for hidden treasure or the Holy Grail is a recurrent mythic form.

In light of the fact that we still retain the genetic structure of our hunting and gathering ancestors, it's not surprising that young boys and girls intuitively play at games that were an integral part of pre-agrarian lifestyles for thousands and thousands of years. Capture the flag, hide and seek, and kick the can are all essentially predator/prey games.

On the island of Carriacou, just north of Grenada in the Caribbean, twenty years ago I stumbled into a children's culture that still preserved many of these elements. In a mixed group of boys and girls one Saturday morning, we collected sea urchins and ate their roe, tried to spear crayfish and moray eels, shook palm trees to loosen the ripe coconuts so we could drink their milk, and climbed way out on scraggly branches to collect starfruit. Along the way we also sang, played skipping games, rolled hoops. Their conventional childhood play was interspersed with hunting and gathering activities that were both functional and recreational. Functional because the fish and animals they caught and the fruit they collected served to amplify their meager diets.

In Conclusion

I've provided you with the tools to dig for your own treasure. The design principles are the tools; the treasure is the compelling experiences you can facilitate. And if you're really lucky, along the way some children will have transcendent experiences that you'll probably never know about. And as my twenty year old daughter recently wrote:

'This connection to the earth, which is everywhere and always nurturing, is one of the greatest gifts I have ever received; it allows me to feel at home anywhere I can plant my feet in the soil and helps me to find solitude and peace within myself and the world around me.'

Sounds like the Holy Grail to me.

David Sobel is the author of:

Place-Based Education: Connecting Classrooms and Communities (2004)

Mapmaking with Children: Sense-of-Place Education for the Elementary Years (1998)

Children's Special Places: Exploring the Role of Forts, Dens, and Bush Houses in Middle Childhood (1993)

Beyond Ecophobia: Reclaiming the Heart in Nature Education (1996)

All of these books are available in Play Wales' library.



Play and the weather

'Bad weather always looks worse through a window.'¹

The sensations we get from different sorts of weather have triggered our emotions and our physical senses for millennia – if we offer any child the opportunity of playing out in them, we offer them a wealth of experience.

According to a recent report by the Institute of Environmental Sciences, over the next decades Wales will see a significant rise in extreme weather conditions – violent storms, drought and severe gales. It is predicted that there will be an increase in yearly temperatures of up to 2.9°C¹ by 2080. This will have an affect not only on the landscape, flora and fauna of Wales but on children's play and play provision – we have already seen the results of two extremely wet summers.

Attitudes to the weather

In our language and our culture 'bad' weather is frequently associated with cold, snow, wind and rain. According to the social thinker, John Ruskin (1819 – 1900) 'Sunshine is delicious, rain is refreshing, wind braces us up, snow is exhilarating; there is really no such thing as bad weather, only different kinds of good weather'.

On the whole, in our experience, children tend to agree with Ruskin – they only give up playing when the weather causes extreme physical or emotional stress. They tell us over and over again that they prefer to play outside – which means encountering all kinds of weather conditions. What stops them playing outside in all weathers? Our attitude and our approach.

There are few weather conditions that occur in Wales that might be directly hazardous to children playing – gales or

a thunderstorm overhead might be two of them. The Canadian Paediatric Society advises us not to send children outside to play if the temperature drops below minus 25°C – which is the point at which skin begins to freeze. We benefit from living in a temperate climate, and our geography means that our weather changes frequently – always offering new (low-cost) play opportunities.

A study commissioned by the Scout Association found that 66% of 'inactive children' associated the word 'cold' with being outdoors². When we adults have a positive attitude and a practical approach towards being out in all weathers, we can convey this to children. Researchers at North Dakota State University found that adults have a significant influence on how children react to weather stress:

'When a weather happening is unexpected, such as a hurricane, tornado or severe flood, it's going to be much more stressful to kids ... Parents are really the filters for how their children experience these situations'

Mood

It is widely assumed that weather reflects our mood, with winter often being associated with feelings of doom and gloom. However, a study of 1233 participants in 2008 by Humboldt University in Berlin³ found that on average, weather had no effect on people's positive moods and very little impact on negative moods. The researcher suggests that we

are complying to a 'culturally transmitted idea' that weather affects mood. What the research didn't consider was the amount of time participants spent outside – and the amount of daylight they were exposed to. But anyone who works with children (or any kind of people) knows that the weather affects the way they play and the mood or emotion within the setting.

The Berlin research goes on to say 'little research data exists for the condition known as "cabin fever". Nonetheless, researchers generally believe that the effects of isolation and boredom, along with the sense that they lack control of their lives, may spawn behavioural changes in children which build up with time.'⁴ Any





parent will recognise the pent up energy and excitable behaviour of young children collected from school at the end of a rainy day when they haven't been given a chance to play outside.

Practical implications

A common sense, practical approach, balancing the risk of children coming to harm against the benefits of playing out whatever the weather, will extend children's experience, enrich their play opportunities and increase their physical and emotional resilience. The UK weather is gradually changing – it is up to us to creatively prepare for these changes and consider how the weather can actually enrich children's play experiences rather than impinging on them.

'Good' weather is frequently associated with sunshine. When the sun shines we are likely to see more children out and about. Yet extreme sun and heat cause children to seek shade. When we are planning places for children to play we need to ensure children have access to

'Anyone who says sunshine brings happiness has never danced in the rain.'

Author Unknown

'Some people walk in the rain, others just get wet.'

Roger Miller (American singer, songwriter, musician 1936–1992)

'A rainy day is the perfect time for a walk in the woods.'

Rachel Carson - (Marine biologist and nature writer 1907-1964)

'People don't notice whether it's winter or summer when they're happy.'

Anton Chekhov (playright and physician 1860 – 1904)

Clothing and protection

Sensible clothing is key to young children feeling comfortable and confident to be outdoors whatever the weather – they are likely to play longer. Wellies and waterproofs can provide a fantastic sense of freedom – particularly for children who are very conscious of having to stay dry and clean. But we can take the lead from children themselves – most are able to decide what they need to wear. Sunscreen is also key to children playing out safely on sunny days – and there is no legislation that says we as professionals can't apply it to children when it is appropriate – we just need sensible procedures and policies.

The forecast

To conclude, when we asked Callum (eight) from Prestatyn what his favourite type of weather is, he replied:

'I like snow best ... cos you can make a snowman ... like, one time, when I was little, I made a snowball and threw it in the air and it fell on my head and got me wet.'

Alys (10) of Tongwynlais says that she loves the rain. Angharad from Bethesda says that she likes sunny summer days.

There is no perfect weather – we just need to support children to make the most of what weather there is.

Useful resources

The Institute for Outdoor Learning encourages outdoor learning by developing quality, safety and opportunity to experience outdoor activity provision and by supporting and enhancing the good practice of those who work in the outdoors.

www.outdoor-learning.org

Rewilding Childhood How children in Europe experience wild nature and how it affects their social and emotional development.

www.imagesfromtheedge.com/rewilding/

Forest Schools An innovative educational approach to outdoor play and learning.

www.forestschools.com



suitable shelter from all weather extremes, especially the sun.

The Secret Garden Outdoor Nursery (see article on page 10) is a great example of how practical thinking means children play out in all weathers. Children can huddle in 'child and adult made structures' that offer warmth and comfort within the natural environment regardless of the weather. The nursery has access to a village hall, which is only used when severe weather conditions require them to 'retreat for safety reasons'. The changes in weather are seen as integral and complementary to the outdoor experience:

Cathy Bache, founder of the Secret Garden, spoke to *The Times* about her approach to weather:

'They just play, they don't have that adult perception that weather is either good or bad ... Last January I woke up to a ferocious gale: a tree had come down in my garden. I thought we might have to

keep the children inside. But every parent brought their child prepared for the wind and rain, so we found a sheltered dip in the woods and spent the day playing in it – after, the children helped me to saw up the fallen tree.'

In the same article a parent of one of the children admitted to thinking 'What am I doing sending him out in this? But it's just an adult perception, the children are used to it and good waterproofs are key. If it's frosty they play with ice and if it's raining they play in puddles.'

Shelter

The Secret Garden is lucky as the forest where it is situated provides a natural shelter from the sun, wind and rain – but shelter can come in many guises; anything from a purpose-built permanent structure to a makeshift tent or den in the trees.

- i www.quotegarden.com/weather (author unknown)
- ii Institute of environmental science. Wales – changing climate challenging choices – the impacts of climate change in Wales from now to 2080. February 2008.
- iii Patrick Brennan, Cathy Lloyd and Joe Saxton, The Scout Association – A study of attitudes and behaviour to inform the development and promotion of outdoor activities – January 2008.
- iv Denissen, J., *Emotion*, October 2008: vol 8: pp 662-667.
- v DeHaan, L and Hawley, D – Parents Influence How Children React to Weather Stress (taken from the North Dakota State University website www.ag.ndsu.edu – 28 May 2009).



Weather Therapy

The *Secret Garden Outdoor Nursery* is an award-winning community-led project that offers a full time outdoor preschool service in Fife – north of Edinburgh. Foundation Phase and Forest Schools offer similar experiences in Wales – but much further south! Cathy Bache, the lead practitioner at the nursery, explains how they play, whatever the weather.



As I write this article the world is dark outside and the rain is teeming down. I have a deep longing to step out into the rain and be part of the purity of this element ... water. Of all the weathers that I experience rain appears to be the one that comforts, elates, brings a smile to my face and uplifts me the most. I ponder on this and am struck by the associations of positive energy that rain holds for me from my childhood.



From the ages of two to six years I lived in Nigeria: the land of superb thunder and lightening storms, rain beating down on corrugated iron roof – and freedom to play out in the rain, dancing, running, squealing, splashing, and water from the heavens wetting arms, toes, hair, fingers delighting. How can a water tray replicate this elemental experience?

Moving to Aberdeen was a climatic change but there was still rain, not as warm and delightful to play in but I have fond memories of rain filled

summer holidays; hunkering down in the woods or hiding out in derelict farm cottages – much joy!

So here I am, 49 years old, playing out in the woods in all weathers, watching the children cope with it magnificently: well dressed, many layers in winter time, waterproofs for a lot of the year. And what do I really believe I'm doing?

One part of *The Secret Garden* experience is to be able to provide a safe woodland space for creative, free, spontaneous, adventurous, explorative, investigative and very relaxed play, all in the natural environment. The other part of the experience is far more subversive; what I like to call 'weather therapy'!

Weather therapy combats all adult misperceptions about what can or cannot be done in foul weather. Yes, sunshine is warm and appears to make life easier. It cocoons us and relaxes us, we can lie and sleep in it with ease but it can also set us up with pretty high expectation as to what the perfect conditions for an outdoor life are: high expectations can lead to great disappointment!

Here in the woods in North East Fife practitioners and children accept the day simply as it is. On being asked by an adult 'what do you do when it rains?' the 4 year old replied 'play', but with a hint of the Bart Simpson 'duh'! Weather is no barrier to the child and play – only the attitude of the adult.

So if we can accept that regardless of the weather there is always the potential for excellent play and we already know that play has the potential to make

children, and adults, very happy, we're in a win-win situation.

My observation is that whilst playing freely, happily and in an environment that offers challenges that develop physical resilience the child has no need to comment or be affected by the weather because the day is simply as it is. We always play outdoors regardless of what the elements grace us with. 'There is no indoors' as a child told his visiting cousin. With this acceptance of what 'is' comes an inner strength that I believe develops emotional resilience and with that a freedom to live life to the fullest.

Reflect for a moment: when the skies are dark and grey and the clouds look as if they're about to empty the oceans upon you does your heart sink or lift?

I cannot know for sure but I like to imagine that, later in life, these children will step out in any weather with an open heart and huge smile. They may recall those wet, cold, frosty, windy days when they became hunters and gatherers for the sticks to light the fire that lifted the soul and spirit, or the day the rain trickled down their neck and it all went a bit miserable but someone in the group thought of an adventure or a game to get us all moving and exploring again, forgetting our chilly fingers.

And yes, after eight hours in the rain it is wonderful to retreat home to a hot bath but there I reflect and marvel at the stamina and creativity of these young children, 'whatever the weather'.

Cathy Bache, Lead Practitioner

The Secret Garden Outdoor Nursery

www.secretgardenoutdoor-nursery.co.uk



The Ingredients of Seasoned Play

Mel Kearsley, Play Development Worker for Wrexham County Borough Council spoke to us about how the weather has a major impact on the play opportunities children engage in. The following anecdotes demonstrate how play on their playschemes can change with the weather.



On hot, sunny days, (once the sun cream has been applied) our playschemes involve lots of water play and children can be found chilling out in the shade when it's just too hot to run around any more. In Rhos, just last week (May half term), children were so excited about having a water slide that they arrived at the playscheme with buckets and bottles of water ready to go and, when supplies started to run low, some children ran back home to get more water to keep the play activity going.

Our playscheme in Penycae is run on the local recreation ground. When it starts to rain (which can be quite often) shelters are hurriedly made by hanging tarpaulins between the fence and the climbing frame on the fixed equipment play area. The shelters are then used for circle games which usually continue once the rain has stopped. On another rainy day in Gwersyllt some children used the wet conditions and the inevitable mud to make a mud slide from their den. They attached a rope to a tree so they could pull themselves back to their den and, as a result, found a perfect way to keep mud phobic adults out.



During the winter both playworkers and children pile on the layers and the play continues. Our playworkers understand that if the children choose to be outside, so are they! On a particularly snowy day in February half term, the Ponciau Banks playscheme session became an alternative Winter Olympics with the lids from our storage boxes being used as sledges and, of course, the usual playworkers versus children snowball fight. What better play environment is there than a snowy one?!

Windy weather can mean that the arts and craft stuff tends to blow away but windy weather also prompts the idea of making kites. Children can often be seen running home with kites on windy days. For other children, the frustration of their arts and crafts things blowing away means that they turn to more physical games like rounders, hide and seek or 'tic'.

Our playschemes run in all school holidays, all year round because no matter what the weather children just keep on wanting to play and so we just keep on providing opportunities for them to do it. Changes in the weather do not stop play but instead provides new experiences and encourages different types of play to occur.



P³ Back on Track

Playwork: Principles into Practice (P³) can continue to run for the next year thanks to financial assistance from Welsh Assembly Government.

To hit the ground running to meet the pre-summer demand, we urge anyone interested in running P³ training to contact Jane Hawkshaw at Playwork Wales as soon as possible so we can plan to meet everyone's needs (029 2048 6050 or jane@playwales.org.uk).

Play Wales has just received confirmation of funding to support the delivery of P³ Level 2 Playwork Qualifications in Wales. This, combined with funding we can draw down from Itech Training Solutions through the Work Based Learning Programme, means we can maintain the necessary infrastructure to enable the delivery of P³ throughout Wales for the forthcoming year.



We are extremely grateful to the Minister, Jane Hutt AM, for her recognition of the unique importance of P³ and her clear commitment to quality playwork in Wales.

We are also very happy to announce that Richard Trew has returned to us as Playwork Qualifications Development Officer and we are soon to recruit a Workforce Development Coordinator to enable the efficient processing of paperwork.

So what does this mean to playworkers and their employers?

We now have the funding to manage and administer P³ but there are still costs that need to be covered by employers. These will include registration, learner handbooks, trainers, assessors and venues. Naturally if employers already have P³ registered trainers and their own venue this will significantly reduce their costs.

We have done all we can to keep the costs of delivery to a minimum, and are working with the Welsh Assembly Government Department of Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills in an effort to draw down more funding from the Work Based Learning Programme that will potentially subsidise the costs in the future.

We intend to submit a revised proposal for European funding that will enable the continued development of P³ so we can offer Level 3 and 4 qualifications as well as level 2.

Thanks

The delay in securing funding has resulted in a turbulent time for us at Play Wales and for everyone involved in the development and delivery of P³. We would like to thank everyone for their support and commitment in helping us develop a playwork qualification that we believe represents a significant step forwards in meeting the training needs of everyone who works in settings where children play.

Playwork Wales website

Behind the scenes we have been working hard on a new bilingual website packed with information that will help visitors understand Welsh playwork education, training, careers and qualifications.

We are planning to launch this brand new resource by mid-July – gremlins notwithstanding!

Over the summer, visit www.playworkwales.org.uk and have a look around. We welcome your feedback.

Potential in Playwork

Thank you to everyone who responded to the consultation on Playwork Wales' draft CPD strategy – Potential in Playwork. We are working on amendments as recommended in the responses and the final document will be published on Playwork Wales new website:

www.playworkwales.org.uk

Playwork: Principles into Practice – P³



Principles
into
Practice

If you want an exciting and effective playwork qualification based on the Playwork Principles and the Welsh context then Play Wales' P³ is for you ...


P³ is the only playwork qualification developed entirely within Welsh borders to meet the needs of people working in Welsh settings where children play.

Play Wales understands playwork in Wales – we led on the Playwork Principles, helped draft the national Play Policy for Wales and we publish The First Claim ... a framework for quality playwork.

P³ is delivered by qualified dynamic playwork trainers from national organisations, local authorities and voluntary and independent organisations across Wales.

The benefits of running P³:

- Employers provide quality services with well-trained and qualified staff that truly meet children's play needs.
- Employers are confident that their staff know what they are doing and why they are doing it.
- Learners understand the theory behind their practice and acquire a wide range of knowledge and skills so they can work effectively in any setting where children play.
- The P³ qualification is cutting edge - based on up-to-date research combined with years of experience.
- P³ is delivered in Welsh as well as English – you choose.
- Learners take away a folder on play and playwork (in English or Welsh) written by some of the most respected and experienced playworkers in the UK.
- Every learner has a chance to enjoy extending their knowledge – even those who found school difficult.
- P³ is delivered in three manageable sections (Award, Certificate and Diploma) each providing a comprehensive course in itself.
- P³ can be run at a pace to meet learners' needs and the needs of the service they provide.
- P³ is tried and tested - piloted in Wales over the past two years – and the positive feedback from participants is overwhelming.



P³ = a playwork qualification to the power of three – devised by playworkers, delivered by playworkers, assessed and verified by playworkers ...

For more information about the P³ level 2 qualification please contact the Workforce Development Team at Play Wales 029 2048 6050 – if you would prefer to discuss P³ in Welsh ask for Aled, or go to our website and click on the Learning Playwork button.

P³ is a level 2 qualification for playworkers who want to make play work.



Events

Love Parks Week

25 July – 2 August 2009

Parks charity *GreenSpace* is asking as many people as possible to organise/ attend an event in their local park to help reinforce the message that parks are an essential part of every community.

www.loveparksweek.org.uk

Playday 'Make Time'

5 August 2009

The annual celebration of children's right to play. From parents, carers and teachers, to policy makers and planners – everyone can make time to support children's right to play.

Find out more at www.playday.org.uk and see our news article in this issue.

The Beauty of Play: The Wildness of Play

4-6 September 2009

Stone, Staffordshire

www.ludemos.co.uk
or email Perry Else
info.ludemos@virgin.net

International Forum for Child Welfare – World Forum 2009

21-24 October 2009

University of Wales Swansea
www.early-education.org.uk

Play, Naturally – whatever the weather

To complement our weather issue, Michelle Jones, one of our Development Officers, tells us about *Play, naturally – a review of children's natural play*, by Stuart Lester and Martin Maudsley (Playwork Partnerships) published by Play England in 2006.

When I was asked to review *Play, Naturally* I thought it would take a couple of days to read and pull some reflections together. What I didn't realise is that I would be finished by 1 o'clock and looking for a pen and paper ...



This is a book that not only allows you to take a journey, but also supports 'dipping' – drawing out the bits you missed first time around. The childhood memories that both Martin and Stuart share in the foreword both set the scene, and encourage floods of your own memories.

The role of the book was to support Playday 2006, but the research does far more than just support one day of play. It covers the nature of children's behaviours, the benefits of natural settings, access to natural play spaces and supporting children's use of them.

The book draws on those who have come before it from Adams to Zeiher. By collating information available in print and

on line it is woven together as a collective study. The book demonstrates and confirms the need of the playing child to connect with the natural environment. It serves as confirmation of what many already know to be true, striking a resonance within us, reminding and reinforcing.

Each chapter includes an introduction with key themes or questions for research – it then goes on to present the findings. The chapter summaries make it a pleasing book to navigate. It is packed with information, further reading and website links.

Play, Naturally does exactly what it suggests in the title; it is a review of children's natural play quoting academic text and journals along with childhood memories, and it had pictures! What more could I ask? ... maybe a chocolate book marker ...

www.playengland.org.uk/resources/play-naturally.pdf

Michelle

Funding

BBC Children in Need

Applications can now only be made online at www.bbc.co.uk/pudsey. Apply at any time – closing dates for the remaining rounds in 2009 are 15 July and 15 October.

The Morgan Foundation – 'Making a difference'

The Morgan Foundation supports charities across North Wales and North West England. The foundation aims to provide funding for small to medium organisations that address specific needs and their primary focus is those who work directly with children and families.

www.morganfoundation.co.uk
or call: 01829 782800.

UnLtd Sport Relief Awards for 11 – 21 year olds

The aim of the programme is to encourage young people (11 – 21) to take the lead in organising activities that involve other young people. Activities can be sport or cultural – for example street soccer, street play, it's-a-knockout, music, film-making.

For more information contact the UnLtd Wales Office: 029 2048 4811