

Play for Wales

Play news and briefing from
the national charity for play

Issue 52 Spring 2019



Play in schools



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Thank you

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 at www.playwales.org.uk

Editorial

As part of the Children's Commissioner for Wales' Spotlight Report Article 31 (the right to play), almost all older children and some as young as 11 years old, told her that school, homework, exams and revision negatively affected their play and free time.

She notes that *'in all responses there was a sense that children and young people accepted that school work was part of their day-to-day lives but that it was a dominating force leaving them with little opportunity for other things.'*

In a global study¹ for Outdoor Classroom Day, 97 percent of teachers said that outdoor play is critical for children to reach their full potential, and 88 percent said that children are happier after playing outdoors.

Parents see the value and benefits of playtime, 84 percent said that they are against school playtimes being shortened or withdrawn for

academic or behavioural reasons, and most importantly children say that playtimes are an essential part of the school day for them.

Given that on a school day, children spend over six hours of their waking day in school – that's about 40 percent – it's reasonable to expect that the school day should be designed to allow time and space for them to relax and play freely with their friends.

Playing enhances children's physical and emotional well-being, however, increasing demands on children's free time means that for some the school day offers one of the few opportunities for play. It is important that schools are encouraged and supported to provide the best quality spaces and opportunities for play as possible.

Play for children is essential. It is a right described in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and access to those rights don't stop at the school gates.

Taking a playful approach to learning and outdoor play and break times is important in schools

across Wales, for children and teachers. Providing enough time, space and permission for play also offers a range of potential benefits to the school and community such as pupil motivation, improvements in behaviour, improved perceptions of community safety and closer links between the school and community.

The demands on schools to achieve academic targets must not be put above the duty to protect the health and well-being of the children in their care nor their right to play. Time and space allocated to play is associated with pupil well-being and should not be considered as an optional extra. Play and time to play should be considered as a positive element of school life.

Mike Greenaway,
Director, Play Wales

¹ Prisk, C. and Cusworth, H. (2018) *From muddy hands and dirty faces ... to higher grades and happy places.*



News

Street play resources

Play Wales supports initiatives that reclaim the streets and neighbourhoods for children and teenagers to be able to range and play.

To support street play projects we have worked with Playing Out – the national organisation that supports street play throughout the UK – to develop resources for residents, local authorities and partners in Wales.

How to organise playing out sessions on your street is a step-by-step guide for residents organising street play sessions. It's based on the experience of parents and residents across the UK. Supporting materials for parents to organise play sessions on their street are also available on our website.

Opening streets for play is a toolkit designed to provide clear and concise information about street play for local authorities and their partners. It's intended to help local authorities to develop policies and procedures to enable resident-led street play projects in their areas. It's also useful for housing associations, school communities, community workers and local residents to understand the opportunities and challenges.



Both publications are available to download at:
www.playwales.org.uk/eng/publications/streetplayresources

Welsh Youth Parliament

Made up from 60 young people from across the country, Wales' newly formed Youth Parliament will give children and young people a voice on matters which affect their lives.

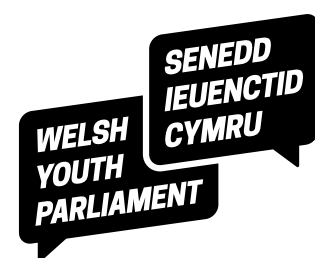
Following a debate at its first ever meeting, the Youth Parliament voted to on which topics to focus on during their two years as Members.

At the Senedd, Members voted to focus on:

- emotional and mental health support

- littering and plastic waste
- life skills in the curriculum.

The Youth Parliament will work with the National Assembly for Wales to make sure children and young people's voices are heard by those with the power to make change in Wales.



More information:
www.youthparliament.wales

Welcome to our new Communications Assistant, Sioned Maskell

Sioned is supporting the work of the Information Service, which includes maintaining the website, co-ordinating social media engagement and translation. Prior to joining our team, Sioned worked as a coordinator with a translation company.



Playful Childhoods

Have you visited our Playful Childhoods website? It's full of practical information and ideas for making childhoods and communities across Wales more playful for every child.

The website helps parents, carers and community groups to give children plenty of good play opportunities to play at home and out in their neighbourhood. It's also a useful resource for professionals to support their work with children and families.

www.playfulchildhoods.wales

What now for the Children's Commissioner?

In October 2018 over 10,000 children, young people and adults took part in the Beth Nawr | What Now national survey conducted by the Children's Commissioner for Wales, Professor Sally Holland, and her team. Children and young people were asked what worried and concerned them about their lives and to identify what they would like to see the Commissioner prioritise in her work.

6,902 children aged between 7 and 11 told the Commissioner that they worry about schoolwork and tests (42 percent), bullying (40 percent) and family problems, including parental separation (27 percent). Some children (38 percent) also told the Commissioner that they had asked their parents to stop using their smartphones in their presence.

The 2,300 young people aged between 11 and 18 that took part in the survey reported that they were worried about schoolwork and exams (45 percent), life after school (40 percent) and the way they look, as well as mental health and well-being (28 percent).



**Comisiynydd
Plant Cymru**
Children's
Commissioner
for Wales

Additionally, 585 professionals working with children and young people in Wales were surveyed. Professionals said that they worry about the mental health of children (86 percent), the effect of social media (81 percent) and about family problems (82 percent).

The findings will be used to inform the Children's Commissioner's work for the next three years.

For more information visit
[www.childcomwales.org.uk/
what-now](http://www.childcomwales.org.uk/what-now)



Playday 2019 will take place on Wednesday 7 August

Playday is an annual celebration of children's right to play with thousands of children and families playing out at events across the UK.

www.playday.org.uk

*Playday is co-ordinated by PlayBoard
Northern Ireland, Play Scotland, Play England
and Play Wales*

Play builds children

The Children's Play Policy Forum believes that play is a powerful builder of happy, healthy, capable children. The benefits of play extend to families, communities and society. In support of this, the Forum has issued a policy statement calling for more children's play opportunities.

The Forum is warning that modern life is squeezing play – especially outdoor play – to the margins of children's lives, limiting the natural growth and development that occurs when children play. The statement – *Play builds children* – also says that mental health of a generation is at risk.

The statement states that play should be prioritised for two important reasons:

- the significance of the harm caused by the lack of play
- the huge benefits that will be gained if we develop environments and everyday lifestyles that support children's play.

Play builds children also sets out the Forum's vision for children, which includes calling on the UK government, the devolved administrations and local authorities to work together to provide more play opportunities.

Chair of the Children's Play Policy Forum, Robin Sutcliffe, said:

'Lack of play leaves children mentally and physically unprepared to cope with life. This affects them in childhood and throughout the rest of their lives. It is urgent that play is prioritised.'

More information:

www.childrensplaypolicyforum.org.uk



How is the Play Cycle understood 20 years from its publication?

In the last twenty years, elements of the Play Cycle* have entered into common use within the playwork sector, and appeared in playwork training and education, text books and underpins professional practice. The Play Cycle gives a theoretical perspective on how children interact with one another and their environment within their play.

Two decades after it was published, researchers Dr Pete King and Dr Shelly Newstead conducted a study to find out 'What are playworkers understanding of the Play Cycle?'. Playworkers were asked to explain in their own words what they thought the six different elements of the Play Cycle meant: play cue, play return, play frame, loop and flow and annihilation.

The results showed there was a variation in playworkers' understanding of the six components when compared to the original definitions and those found in published

texts. The variations were related to years of playwork practice and level of playwork qualification. Detailed results will be published in *The Play Cycle: Theory, Research and Application* (Pete King and Gordon Sturrock).

For more information please contact Pete King:
p.f.king@swansea.ac.uk

* Sturrock, G. and Else, P. (1998) *The playground as therapeutic space: playwork as healing*. Also referred to as 'The Colorado Paper'.

Time, space and permission to play in school

Children's opportunities for playing in all settings – for example schools, childcare, staffed play provision – are dependent on a wide range of issues, which are arranged across three themes of:

- **Time:** how time is structured and the obligations children have on their time
- **Space:** the amount, design and management of space
- **Permission:** fear, expectations, tolerance, and the way adults view childhood and play.

Across all settings where children find themselves, it's important to make sure that they have time, space and permission to play – these are the conditions that support play. While children will actively seek out opportunities to play wherever they are, it can be compromised if conditions are not supportive.

Playtimes and breaktimes at school are seen as very important by both children and their parents*:

- 73 percent of children say that school is the main chance they have to play with their friends
- 55 percent of children report that they sometimes rush their lunch at school so they have time to play
- 84 percent of parents say they are against school playtimes being shortened
- 94 percent of parents assert that it is important to allocate time for play during school hours.

Providing space for play

A rich play environment is one where children of all ages are able to make a wide range of choices – there are many possibilities so that they can invent and extend their own play. It's a varied, inspirational and interesting physical environment that maximises the potential for socialising, creativity, resourcefulness and challenge. It's a place where children feel free to play in their own way, on their own terms.

Wales – a Play Friendly Country (Welsh Government, 2014), statutory guidance to local authorities on assessing for and securing sufficient play opportunities for children in their areas, defines quality play provision as provision which offers all children and young people the opportunity to freely interact with or experience:

- **Other children and young people** – with a choice to play alone or with others, to negotiate, co-operate, fall out and resolve conflict
- **The natural world** – weather, the seasons, bushes, trees, plants, insects, animals and mud
- **Loose parts** – natural and man-made materials that can be manipulated, moved and adapted, built and demolished
- **The natural elements** – earth, air, fire and water
- **Challenge and risk taking** – both physical and emotional
- **Playing with identity** – role play and dressing up
- **Movement** – running, jumping, climbing, balancing and rolling
- **Rough and tumble** – play fighting
- **The senses** – sounds, tastes, textures, smells and sights.

Creating time for play in schools

For many reasons children's time for play has decreased significantly in recent years. By making time for children's play we promote and value children's freedom, independence and choice – these characteristics perform a crucial role in children's resilience, ability to deal with stress and anxiety, and general well-being.

The demands on schools to achieve academic targets must not be put above the duty to protect the health and well-being of the children in their care. Time and space allocated to play is associated with pupil well-being and should therefore be considered as a positive element of school life.

Ensuring permission

When we reminisce about our childhoods many of us will recall happy times spent playing, mostly outdoors and with children of various ages. Children need permission and support from school staff to play outdoors.

To demonstrate a supportive attitude towards play we should ensure we do not:

- Dismiss it as frivolous and a waste of time
- Unintentionally be unenthusiastic
- Over regulate and over organise it
- Unnecessarily restrict it through fear
- Only use play as a vehicle for learning, educational or health outcomes that need to be met.

Playing enhances children's physical and emotional well-being, however, increasing demands on children's free time means that for some the school day offers one of the few opportunities for play. Developing a School Play Policy that endorses play will enable the school to articulate the actions it's taking to protect the children's right to play.

* ICM (2009) *Playday 2009 opinion poll*. Available at: www.playday.org.uk/campaigns-3/previous-campaigns/2009-make-time



Example School Play Policy

This school recognises the importance of all the children who attend having sufficient time and good places to play freely as part of their day.

To children, playing is one of the most important aspects of their lives. Playing contributes to children's health, well-being and happiness as well as to their learning and their ability to learn. Some children only have the opportunity to play with their friends at school. Most importantly playing contributes to children's ability to thrive and survive.

We believe that we can make a very positive contribution to children's lives by valuing their urge and desire to play and providing for a broad range of play opportunities within the school's playground before, during and after the school day.

This school recognises that children will naturally create and/or seek out challenging situations; while making the most of their play some children may have accidents, get dirty or wet or upset. We recognise that any potential risk of harm to children needs to be balanced with the potential for good that may come from their taking part in a particular form of play. We will do our best to avoid children coming to serious physical or emotional harm by carefully managing the play opportunities that we provide.

This school believes that adults' attitude towards, and understanding of, children's play behaviour will have a significant effect on the quality of the play opportunities offered within and outside the school. This school will therefore seek out training opportunities and support research among its staff so that they are confident to facilitate children's freely chosen, self-directed play.

This school endorses the child's right to play. We will do our best to consider the value to pupil well-being when making decisions on the planning and length of the school day including playtimes, lunchtimes and homework scheduling. We will not withdraw opportunities for play or use it as a sanction; the threat of withdrawal of play will not be used to control children's behaviour.

Play team supports Torfaen's school children and young people

Andrea Sysum, Torfaen's Play and Short Breaks Services' Play Policy Officer, tells us about how play is used to support children in schools across the county.



Play and Enhancement Project

The Play and Enhancement Project engages with pupils aged 4 to 16 years on modified timetables due to their behaviour and social and emotional needs. A large percentage of pupils engaged in the project are Looked after Children (LAC) or on the verge of becoming LAC. The pupils are on modified timetables which means they may only access education for two to three hours a day.

The playworkers support children and young people within the community environment to play. By providing safe environments for vulnerable children and young people to play, it allows them to let off steam with a cathartic effect. Play is vital to the children as many are in foster care and have no or little consistency within their lives. This project allows children and young people to play and build positive relationships with playworkers. Many playworkers are also advocates for vulnerable young people and often attend LAC reviews to champion the child or young person's views and opinions.

The play sessions can take place on an individual basis or within small groups. For many of the pupils the first thing

that the school stops or reduces is their play time therefore, this project is integral to supporting the play needs of some of Torfaen's most vulnerable pupils. Some of the children have also been affected by Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and many have not even experienced some of the most common and basic childhood play encounters.

'Moving on Up' Project

Torfaen Play Service is currently working in partnership with schools and the Counselling Service to deliver a transition project through play. The aim is to support year six pupils through the transition from primary to secondary school. Pupils from feeder schools are identified to partake in the project which focuses on increasing confidence and reduce any anxiety or fears linked to going to a new school.

The sessions take place over the summer holidays and allow for pupils from different schools to get to know each other through play.

Play activities take place along with issue based discussions and workshops. This includes an afternoon tour of the new school as well as discussing what timetables and planners will look like. By allowing the children to play together, it breaks down many barriers. Feedback on the project demonstrates a reduction in fears and concerns. Children say that they are more confident about starting secondary school as they had made new friends and were more prepared for their new adventure.

www.torfaen.gov.uk/en/EducationLearning/ChildrenandYoungPeople/PlayService/PlayService.aspx



Vale Play Team's work in schools



For many years the Vale of Glamorgan Play Development Team has been working in partnership with various schools to deliver play opportunities during the school holidays for children requiring extra support (Families First Holiday club).

This partnership has resulted in the team being involved in case conferences where it's evident that many of the children the team supports struggle in schools, institutions and other situations. However, the case conferences determined that the play environment offers a space and unique non-stigmatising approach that best meets children's individual and complex needs.

One initiative that grew out of the partnership is Playworkers in Training, which supports older children who display challenging behaviour issues in schools. Mentored by playworkers, older children are given responsibility in playscheme to support younger children in the session. The playworkers in training are caring to younger children, who relate well to their older peers. The older children generally engage better with adults and being a playworker in training provides the opportunity to play with other children. Play staff recognise that these are children who need opportunities to play and the status of being a playworker in training has provided permission for them to play in a comfortable and familiar space.

Engagement in case conferences and work with schools and other professionals, has led to the Play Team being asked to support children in schools through advising on the creation of play spaces that best meet the needs of the individual children, particularly those understood to have attachment or trauma issues. Some children

struggle to spend long periods of time in structured lessons in the classroom. They may be provided with board games or activities with instructions, but, due to the nature of their condition and behaviour, this sometimes leads to frustration and a feeling of failure if things don't work out as instructed.

Recognising that it might be better for some children to leave a classroom for a short time,

some schools are creating rooms to support them. With advice from the Play Team, these rooms are equipped with cushions and various loose parts play materials for children to change and create their own comforting space. The non-descript nature of the loose parts means that children lead their play and the design and use of the space, therefore contributing and supporting to their own sense of well-being.



Loose parts play

at Mount Stuart Primary School

The theory of loose parts was first proposed back in the 1970s by architect Simon Nicholson, who believed that it is the loose parts in our environment that empower our creativity. Loose parts are materials that can be moved, carried, combined, redesigned, lined up, and taken apart and put back together in multiple ways. Loose parts are materials with no specific set of directions that can be used alone or combined with other materials, therefore can be used any way that the children choose and can be adapted and manipulated in many ways.



Debbie Dunkley, a teacher in Mount Stuart Primary School in Cardiff, explains how loose parts play lends itself well to child-led learning:

We are regularly told that the occupations of children in the future have not yet been invented. Jobs are becoming increasingly automated. Many economists believe that the last jobs to be automated will require creativity, problem solving and social skills, so these are key skills for us to focus on in education.

Playing with loose parts generally develops more skill and competence than most modern plastic toys as children need to use creativity and imagination to create their own worlds. They engage, support and enrich all types of learners and learning intelligences. Open ended learning, experimentation, problem solving, and critical thinking are all developed through the use of loose parts. These are all important skills to develop in a rapidly changing world.

As teachers, many of us have spent hours creating wonderful small world areas for children to play with. What happens next? The children rarely play with the area in the way we intended. We then bemoan the

children's lack of creativity and provide them with even more structured adult-planned resources, continuing the cycle. Every time we set up an area for the children, we take away the opportunity for them to think about it or imagine it for themselves.

To implement loose parts effectively we need to value the children's creativity, as well as our own. As with any other subject, we must carefully observe and identify where children are in their learning, intervening to move their learning on and thinking carefully about why and how we are intervening. This could be through modelling, questioning, and demonstrating, by an adult or peer-to-peer.

The loose parts theory is about remembering that the best play comes from things that allow children to play in different ways and on different levels. Environments that include loose parts are infinitely more stimulating and engaging than static ones. The play environment should promote and support imaginative play through the provision of loose parts in a way that doesn't direct play and play opportunities, but allows children to develop their own ideas and explore their world.

Loose parts:

- have no defined use and staff support children when they decide to change the shape or use of them, with minimum adult intervention. Loose parts are a springboard for child-centred play.
- are accessible physically and stored where they can be reached by children. The children know that they can use them however they wish.
- are regularly replenished, changed and added to. When replenishing it's important to remember that it is not our job to think about how items will be used – it's the children's!

Example types of loose parts	
Type	Examples
Nature	Sticks, rocks, pebbles, flowers, leaves, seeds, pinecones
Wood	Blocks and planks in various shapes and sizes, corks, clothes pegs, wooden beads, chair legs, dowels, wooden blocks, scrabble pieces
Plastic	Milk bottles, lids, food containers, pvc pipes, film canisters, hair rollers, curtain rings, straws, CD cases, beads, bubble wrap, cones, buttons, funnels
Metal	Nuts and bolts, washers, bangles, pipe cleaners, tin foil, muffin tins, magnets, keys, forks and spoons
Ceramic and glass	Tiles, beads, gems, sea glass, mirrors
Fabric and ribbon	Chiffon, twine, ribbon, scarves, flags, hessian, cotton wool, cushions
Packaging	Cardboard sheets, boxes, wrapping paper, egg cartons, paper scraps

Questions to support an adult-led session or loose parts planning with children:

- What could we make?
- What do we need to include?
- What could we use?
- What are the alternatives?
- What have you made?
- How have you made it?
- How can we modify / improve our construction?

Ways to add additional support and challenge

- Photos, pictures of scenes or objects
- Discuss 'My Time' book, story, photo or song inspiration
- Demonstrate a particular skill, for example balancing, bridging or attaching
- Model the play – build your own alongside them or leave something out that you have started, inviting children to extend
- Add clip boards, paper, pens and pencils
- Encourage planning and model drawing
- Encourage the addition of written signs, labels, speech bubbles or writing a script
- Leave creations out for children to add to over time
- Table top activities – make a scene, for example night sky, under the sea, zoo or park.

Loose parts and Blooms Taxonomy

Children's thinking during the use of loose parts can be categorised using the same levels as Blooms Taxonomy of learning. The level of complexity behind their thinking increases as children's proficiency develops. The goal is the application and demonstration of higher order thinking.

Representational – remembering and understanding

Children begin by making creations that represent an object or place they have knowledge of, for example a cake or a house. These representations begin as simple structures such as a bead on a wooden cookie to represent a cake, or an enclosure made of blocks to represent a house.

Complex representation – applying, analysing, evaluating

Children modify and improve simple structures to create more complex structures where features are applied and analysed, for example a cake with tiers and candles, or a house with a door, windows and a bed. There may be characters involved such as a person at the wheel of a car, but play with these characters is not developed.

Fantasy structures and dramatic play with complex fantasy structures – creating

Children start to use their imagination to create imaginary worlds. These can be based on reality but are developed using imagination and creativity, for example an ice palace or pirate ship.

Children begin to populate their objects or places with people and animals that they use to engage in small world play, re-telling stories that they know and creating their own imagined storylines.

For information about storage, gathering loose parts and other logistical issues read our *Resources for playing – providing loose parts to support children's play toolkit*: www.playwales.org.uk/eng/publications/loosepartstoolkit

Play and education rights: making the links

All children have the right to play as recognised in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

In 2013 the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted a General Comment that clarifies for governments worldwide the meaning and importance of Article 31 of the UNCRC. A General Comment is an official statement that elaborates on the meaning of an aspect of the UNCRC that seems to require further interpretation or emphasis. It also aims to raise the importance of an article and increase accountability among countries that have signed up to the Convention.

The General Comment on Article 31 puts emphasis on the role of children's opportunity to play in their own way. It also positions the right to play within the fuller context of the other relevant articles in the UNCRC as it sets out how the right to play is crucially linked with the rights to an education, particularly in Articles 28 and 29.

Article 28 (right to education)

Every child has the right to an education. Discipline in schools must respect children's dignity and their rights.

Article 29 (goals of education)

Education must develop every child's personality, talents and abilities to the full. It must encourage the child's respect for human rights, as well as respect for their parents, their own and other cultures, and the environment.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child asserts that the rights under Article 31 are of positive benefit to children's educational development. It notes that inclusive education and inclusive play are mutually reinforcing and should be facilitated during the course of every day throughout early childhood education, as well as in primary and secondary school.

The Committee identifies the pressure for educational attainment as potentially denying children of their right to play, highlighting:

- 'Early childhood education is increasingly focused on academic targets and formal learning at the expense of participation in play and attainment of broader development outcomes;
- Extracurricular tuition and homework are intruding on children's time for freely chosen activities;

- The curriculum and daily schedule often lack recognition of the necessity of or provision for play, recreation and rest;
- The use of formal or didactic educational methods in the classroom do not take advantage of opportunities for active playful learning;
- Contact with nature is decreasing in many schools with children having to spend more time indoors;
- Restrictions on the type of play in which children can engage in school serve to inhibit their opportunities for creativity, exploration and social development.*

The General Comment maintains that educational environments should play a major role in addressing the challenges relating to the fulfilment of the right to play. Recommendations include:

- **'Physical environment of settings:** States parties should aim to ensure the provision of adequate indoor and outdoor space to facilitate play, during and around school hours; active promotion of equal opportunities for both girls and boys to play; adequate sanitation facilities for boys and girls; playgrounds, play landscapes and equipment that are safe and properly and regularly inspected; playgrounds with appropriate boundaries; equipment and spaces designed to enable all children, including children with disabilities, to participate equally; play areas which afford opportunities for all forms of play; location and design of play areas with adequate protection and with the involvement of children in the design and development;
- **Structure of the day:** Statutory provision, including homework, should guarantee appropriate time during the day to ensure that children have sufficient opportunity for rest and play, in accordance with their age and developmental needs;
- **Educational pedagogy:** Learning environments should be active and participatory and offer, especially in the early years, playful activities and forms of engagement'.

A further recommendation involves training and capacity-building. The Committee advises that all professionals working with or for children, or whose work impacts on children (such as government officials, educators, health professionals, social workers, early years and care workers, planners and architects) should receive systematic and ongoing training on the human rights of children, including the rights represented in Article 31. Such training should include guidance on how to create and sustain environments in which the right to play can be most effectively realised by all children.

* United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2013) *General Comment No. 17 on the right of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts (art. 31)*. Geneva: Committee on the Rights of the Child

Children and young people's physical activity

Following its inquiry into children and young people's physical activity, the National Assembly for Wales' Health, Social Care and Sport Committee has published a comprehensive report, making 20 recommendations now being considered by Welsh Government.

Although noting that addressing inactivity in children does not fall solely to schools, the Committee believes physical activity is not given enough priority in schools and that this must change. Committee Members believe the development of the forthcoming new curriculum offers an opportunity to redress the balance by giving physical activity the attention and priority it deserves.

Dr Nalda Wainwright, Director of the Wales Institute for Physical Literacy at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, provided evidence to the Committee. Recognising the increasing barriers in society that mean extended outdoor free play is no longer accessible for all children, Nalda says:

'Structured play and free play are vital for children to lay the foundations of movement that are needed for later access to physical activity. Quality movement experiences play a vital role in early childhood. Children need opportunities for a variety of rich movement experiences such as climbing, crawling and swinging to develop both their core strength, balance system and co-ordination which are vital as the foundations for later motor skill development.'

'We are seeing increasing numbers of children entering pre-school settings without these good foundations. This impacts on their ability to learn to run and jump and catch and throw etc. Although we have a programme of SKIP-Cymru that trains professionals to teach these skills (noted in the report), there are still huge challenges for ensuring families know about the importance of movement for their young children and also have access to appropriate spaces for them to have quality movement experiences.'*



Play Wales welcomes the inclusion of children's play within the Committee's *Physical Activity of Children and Young People* report. In particular, we are pleased to see that our concerns regarding the decrease and withdrawal of playtime in schools are noted. However, it is disappointing that

this issue did not inform a recommendation, despite concerns raised from other respondents, including Public Health Wales.

Whilst we are pleased to see the recommendation that access to school facilities for opportunities beyond school hours is improved, we had hoped to see a greater emphasis on the need to make these spaces available for children and families to use for child-led play opportunities as well as the opportunity to take part in more structured extra-curricular activities. This would mean that children of all ages can benefit from the use of the space, therefore responding to advice regarding the need for better physical activity opportunities for very young children.

Interventionist programmes can be useful in encouraging more physical activity. However, they must be complemented by a focus on supporting children to have time for play alongside other physical activity interventions. We know that every aspect of children's lives is influenced by their urge to play, and that self-directed, self-determined playing offered by quality play opportunities increases children's chances to build their own resilience and support their own health and well-being.

More information about the report:
www.assembly.wales/en/newhome/Pages/newsitem.aspx?itemid=1962

*SKIP-Cymru stands for Successful Kinaesthetic Instruction for Pre-Schoolers in Wales and was developed from Professor Jackie Goodway's work in the USA to address delays in children's motor skill development.

Research: children's right to play in schools

Researchers at the University of Manchester – Cathy Atkinson, Siân Bristow, Rebecca Finney, Natasha Goodhall and Francesca Woods – share an overview of their various research studies into children's right to play in schools.



There is growing interest amongst educational psychologists (EPs) in promoting children's right to play in schools. Indeed, in the near future, the British Psychological Society's Division of Educational and Child Psychology is planning to release a position statement, soliciting its members to promote children's right to play within their work with schools and teachers.

The impetus for this statement has come from research undertaken by trainee EPs completing a three-year doctoral programme at the University of Manchester, including an article by Atkinson, Bond, Goodhall and Woods (2017). This article will showcase some of this research, considering implications for practice.

Play opportunities within a Rights Respecting School

Schools granted the gold UNICEF Rights Respecting School award have evidenced embedding all of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the

Child (UNCRC) rights within their policy and practice. Research undertaken by Francesca Woods aimed to find out how one such UNICEF accredited primary school facilitated play for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Francesca carried out a case study at the school, interviewing children with SEND and their teachers, and observing children during playtimes. Play was facilitated for children with SEND at both the whole-school and individual level. At the whole-school level, teachers' knowledge of play, and their belief in its importance helped ensure play opportunities were provided. Teachers were also receptive to children's views and provided opportunities for different types of play at breaktimes, based on the children's preferences.

At an individual level, teachers considered barriers to play activities and aimed to overcome these, for example by building a path for a wheelchair onto the playing field. Teachers' responsiveness to children's

preferences meant that play opportunities within the school were constantly changing in line with children's interests, with teachers problem-solving to overcome barriers to engagement.

Children's perceptions of work and play

A 'systematic review', conducted by Natasha Goodhall (Goodhall and Atkinson, 2017) brought together findings from twelve different studies which revealed that even very young children differentiate 'play' from 'work' within school curricula. Factors influencing whether children perceived an activity as play or work included:

- Choice: whether the activity was adult-directed or voluntary
- Environment: whether the setting for the activity was formal (for example at tables) or informal (for example on the floor or outside)
- Teacher presence: whether an adult was directing, watching or absent
- Enjoyment: whether or not they had fun
- Type of activity: whether it involved toys, was critiqued by teachers, was effortful, goal or process-orientated.

Generally, children identified clear boundaries between play and work. However, some settings adopted a child-centred approach, where playfulness and spontaneity were encouraged, and control of activities was shared. Here the lines between play and work were more blurred. Children could take responsibility for their learning in developmentally-appropriate ways, and adults engaged in playfulness, promoting children's ownership and enjoyment. The review concluded that capturing children's views can potentially help to create optimal learning environments for all children, which facilitate access to their right to play, and benefit playing, learning and development in a seamless fashion.

How children's play experiences change on transition to high school

To explore older children's play opportunities, Rebecca Finney explored the views of Year 6 (primary) and Year 7 (secondary) pupils living in the same community about their access to play opportunities. Six workshops were conducted with each year group with children highlighting factors related to time, space and psychological factors (such as being safe and enjoying the experience) affecting their play opportunities.

Overall Year 6 pupils reported more opportunities for play than Year 7 pupils, across home, school and the community contexts, despite both groups reporting

restrictions due to homework demands, the weather, safety concerns and school rules. Although Year 7 pupils reported an increase in their independence since starting secondary school, they also felt they now had less permission to play. Year 7 pupils feared that they would be targeted or rejected by other children for playing, in school and in the community.

Both year groups referenced negative attitudes towards older children, lack of appropriate equipment and traffic as barriers to play access.

Children researching the impact of school playtime on well-being

Research has shown that poor experiences of playtime at school, such as feeling lonely or being bullied, can have a negative effect upon children's short and long-term mental health and well-being. Siân Bristow trained four 9 to 10 year old children to act as researchers to find out about the social, emotional and well-being aspects of playtime in their school. She supported the children in successfully observing their playtimes and conducting focus groups with children aged 5 to 10.

Children in the focus groups suggested that friends, games, having something to do and how they are treated by the other children were the most important things that affected their well-being at playtime. The children also emphasised the links between these factors: for example, they said that it wasn't enough just to have games to play if their friends didn't want to play them with them. Strengths and areas for development of playtime were identified within this school and bespoke interventions implemented to promote children's right to play at the school.

Implications and next steps

The research above has wide-ranging implications for EPs, teachers and school-based professionals. An important part of the research is dissemination, and studies have been presented at national conferences for playworkers and EPs. However, there is also ongoing work with schools and local authorities to ensure that schools are instrumental in promoting children's right to play.

For more information, please contact Cathy Atkinson: cathy.atkinson@manchester.ac.uk

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Joint statement on children's play - key messages for schools

In the autumn 2018 issue of *Play for Wales*, we reported that Play Wales has worked with Public Health Wales on a joint statement for children's outdoor play. The joint statement advocates for outdoor play in a society that is becoming increasingly risk averse, leading to children having fewer opportunities to play outside. It explores how we can establish the conditions to support outdoor play, identifies barriers to outdoor play and recommends the actions required to address them. It also states clearly what Play Wales and Public Health Wales would like to see happen to address barriers.

The statement is informed by a background paper which focuses on the importance of play, the barriers faced by children in accessing play and the possible solutions. The paper takes its definition of play from General Comment No. 17¹ which says:

- *'play is initiated, controlled and structured by children*
- *play is as non-compulsory, driven by intrinsic motivation, not a means to an end*
- *play has the key characteristics of fun, uncertainty, challenge, flexibility and non-productivity'*.

Here, we focus on the key messages the joint statement identifies for schools.

In statutory play sufficiency guidance, Welsh Government² notes that schools provide an important opportunity for children to play during the school day. This might be through the provision of morning, lunchtime and afternoon playtimes, as well as with an interesting play environment for breaks.

Play Wales and Public Health Wales are concerned, that despite the benefits of and the importance children and parents place on school playtime, it is under threat in Wales. In many cases it is being reduced or eliminated altogether in response to pressure to include more teaching on basic skills or to shorten school days. One assumption is that what happens during playtime is unimportant and that reallocating that time to



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traditional instruction will improve school performance.³ Other reasons given for reducing playtime include adult concerns of aggressive behaviour in the playground and fear of litigation.

In the UK, a study⁴ found that around half of all schools, both primary and secondary, had reduced playtime. A follow up report in England and Wales in 2006 by the same authors revealed further reductions and the virtual withdrawal of afternoon break at secondary level. Individual schools vary the amount of playtime they allow and some introduce restrictions including separating younger and older children, zoning, restricting more adventurous equipment to specific occasions, and declaring green areas out of bounds for some or most of the year.⁵

As a child spends more than six hours a day and 28 weeks of the year at school, for at least 12 years of life, children have considerable opportunities to play in this setting. International empirical evidence suggests that school playtime initiatives aimed at enriching play opportunities are linked to a range of improvements in academic skills, attitudes and behaviour, and to improved social skills, improved social relations between different ethnic groups, and better adjustment to school life.⁶

Play Wales and Public Health Wales' Joint Statement on the Health Benefits of Outdoor Play: Access to Outdoor Play, Particularly Outdoors, is Essential for a Happy and Healthy Childhood

Overarching statements:

1. Public Health Wales and Play Wales recognise the health benefits of play and are committed to every child having the opportunity to play outdoors daily.
2. There are clear benefits to children and young people in playing outdoors, for both mental well-being and short and long term physical health.



Key messages for schools:

Schools, as a central resource for the local community, should be encouraged to consider the options to make their school grounds available for free play after school and at weekends.

Play Wales is committed to helping schools make their grounds available to local children out of teaching hours and will continue to widely promote the *Use of school grounds for playing out of teaching hours* toolkit.

Schools should consider the value to pupil well-being when making decisions on the planning and length of the school day including playtimes, lunchtimes and homework scheduling.

Schools should provide adequate facilities, equipment and supervision during the lunchtime.

The demands on schools to achieve academic targets must not be put above the duty to protect the health and well-being of the children in their care. Time allocated to play is associated with pupil well-being and should therefore be considered as a positive element of school life.

School landscape design and playground design which supports play should feature in new school design from the outset.

Public Health Wales is committed to ensuring that protected time for play and rich environments for play should feature as necessary criteria in any refreshed criteria for the Welsh Network of Healthy Schools Scheme and the Healthy Pre-school Scheme.

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An interview with the Minister

In December 2018, Julie Morgan, the Assembly Member for Cardiff North, was appointed the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services. We recently chatted to the Minister about her own play memories and what's changed over the years for her grandchildren.

What are your favourite play memories?

I lived at the edge of a village when I was a child. It was the sort of street where you could go out to play because it had a wide pavement and not too much traffic. So, we used to have a great time. We built dens in the nearby woods and we used to go exploring and it felt very safe and very happy. I've got very happy memories of playing.

Looking at your own experiences, what differences have you noticed compared with the play opportunities your grandchildren have?

I've got eight grandchildren and looking at what they do, they have a lot more supervised activities than I used to. The opportunities for playing seem to be much less, for example children don't seem to be able to play in the street as much as they used to. That must be largely to do with traffic, which is completely understandable, and parents' fear of danger.

It's so important for children to have the opportunity to be independent and go out by themselves and learn skills through interacting with other children, without an adult being present. Children are doing things all the time, but they're going to a sports activity or a drama activity. These things are really important but just going out to play doesn't seem to happen so much.

Do your grandchildren have the same freedom and opportunities as when you grew up?

No, I don't feel that they do. Life seems to be more complicated, and some of that seems to be the attraction of screen time. All the children I know want to be on social media a lot, where they do communicate with friends, have friendship groups and play games, but they don't have the face-to-face time and the outdoor time.

It's really important to be outdoors because that's where you can get the greatest freedom and where you can be healthy, happy and out in all weathers. I can remember

playing outside, we weren't put off by the rain – you could always go under a tree, so it's really important to have that opportunity. It's so important as well because it keeps you fit – outside you've got the opportunity to run and jump and play and dance round, which you can't do so easily indoors! And it's good to do those things without supervision.

How do you think we could improve things for today's children and future generations?

There's a lot that we could do. First of all, the built environment could be built in a way that encourages children to be able to play safely outside. Dedicated playful areas should be built into the environment, particularly in cities and urban areas. They don't have to be grand play areas or playschemes. They can be a patch or area of land where children can play.

I also strongly support the idea of street play. It's a very positive thing that can be done to provide areas which are dedicated to play.

We also need to value play, which would make it much better for children. Obviously, Play Wales does do that – thank goodness you're there! And, the Welsh Government of course values play because we've legislated about assessing and providing opportunities for play.

We've got to recognise is that it's really important to have space in children's lives for play and not fill up all their time with organised activities. We need to leave space to provide opportunities for play and to take this positive attitude that play is very important, very good for children and helps them to develop in a way that formal activities won't.

It's absolutely crucial to develop well rounded children who can cope with difficulties in life.



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Teenagers need play and leisure opportunities too

Seren Leconte, a member of the Children's Commissioner for Wales' Advisory Panel, shares her views on the play and leisure opportunities available for teenagers - and how they can be improved.

I believe that children between the ages of 12 to 16 do not have the right knowledge or facilities to be able to play. As a 14-year-old girl I wouldn't particularly like to go to the park with a few of my friends because I find that quite immature. However, I also can't do things or go to places that someone over 16 could, for example music festivals. Therefore, I think that there should be more types of play offered to those of my age category.

First, I think that most children do not even know what the definition of 'play' means and would mostly likely refer to their consoles and online games when the word is mentioned. In addition, most teenagers today just sit at home on their phones on social media and put off the homework that is most likely due the next day. I know this because I admittedly do this sometimes as well!

But it's different in a way for me and I guess I'm quite lucky that I professionally swim as a British para swimmer and in my spare time, which I don't have very much of, I go to places such as the forest with my very large and close family. But not everyone is like me and sadly aren't as fortunate, so that's why I think that the ages of 12 to 16 should be investigated a lot more for the types of play that would spark joy for teenagers.

There are many ideas that could be developed but here are some examples that I think could be useful.

Local leisure centres could host termly mini music, colour and light festivals for teenagers as I know that children of my age love music and socialising.

Another example could be to have volunteer groups to hold a day of sport within communities, but not just the usual sports such as rugby, football and netball because that will only attract a specific kind of audience. The sports that may attract a wider range of audience, as they are not regularly available, could include dodge ball, baseball, mud courses, water polo, abseiling and coasteering. These are sports which



Seren and the Children's Commissioner at the Symposium

don't get offered to our ages very often, so this could steer them to attend.

When I attended the 2018 Four Nations Play Symposium, hosted by Play Wales, representing Sally Holland, the Children's Commissioner for Wales, I was very shocked to see that the largest country of the four nations potentially has the most limited amount of facilities available for play. This shocked me because we often see England setting the standards and the best examples of providing opportunities for youth in the UK. I was also very proud and quite surprised to see that Wales has one of the best. But overall all four nations have areas to improve and I hope that my ideas can contribute to something greater in the future for teenagers.

Thank you for reading my article.

Workforce development

Spotlight on...

Youth and Community Co-ordinator

In each issue we will be talking to a professional in the world of play and playwork to provide an insight into the diversity of the workforce and the job roles available. This issue we speak to Ben Thomas from Llanharan Drop In Centre in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Can you tell us a bit about yourself and how you got in to playwork?

I started in playwork 16 years ago as a young volunteer and then as a paid job in the summer holidays while doing a sports diploma at college. About eight years ago I got my Youth Work Level 2 qualification and since then have gone on to do playwork. I worked as a prison officer to gain youth work experience and then got a job as the Youth and Community Co-ordinator at Llanharan Drop In Centre about 18 months ago having completed my playwork training.

I've done the Level 2 Award in Playwork Practice (L2APP), Level 3 Managing a Holiday Play Scheme (MAHPS) and am now training to become a playwork trainer and doing

the Award in Delivering Dynamic Playwork Training (ADDaPT).

What does your role involve?

As the Youth and Community Co-ordinator I plan and organise playschemes, after school clubs, activity clubs and youth clubs. We work in two schools five days a week, running after school clubs offering two hours of provision per day. Part of my job is building the relationship with the headteachers of the two schools to promote and develop the sessions.

What's the best bit about your job?

I really enjoyed leading the holiday playscheme last year because I got to spend the whole summer outside

working with the children – doing water slides, going down to the river, playing on the park and just having a ball to be honest!

What do you find challenging about your job?

Because I'm more of a people person and I prefer to be working face-to-face, I find the office side of things is the most challenging. But, I understand that there are elements of the job where I have to be applying for funding, submitting monitoring and completing service level agreements because if I didn't do these things we wouldn't have the money to continue running our service and I wouldn't get to do the fun bits during the summer!

Strong Welsh contingent at the National Playwork Conference

The National Playwork Conference, held in Eastbourne in March 2019, proved to be an inspiring couple of days thinking, talking and learning playwork with some of the best playwork minds from across the UK.

Particularly pleasing was the strong representation from Wales, across all aspects of the event. Taking a tour around the workshops, Pete King from Swansea University presented research on practitioners understanding of the Play Cycle (conducted with Shelley Newstead), and Playful Futures' Simon Bazley presented on his schools project which has had significant success

in improving children's playtimes in schools across north Wales.

In the evening, Siôn Edwards from Wrexham Youth and Play Partnership became the only person to address the National Playwork Awards using 'yr hen iaith' (Welsh) with an engaging and amusing bilingual presentation. Colin Powell from Wrexham and Play Wales' Workforce Development Officer,

Martin King-Sheard were both shortlisted in this year's awards. Congratulations to all the award winners and those nominated for their work.

Other Welsh delegates from Coleg y Cymoedd, The Land, The Venture and Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs provided a good representation of the sector in Wales to our UK colleagues.

Seeking learners for a new qualification!

From September 2019 our new qualification, the *Agored Cymru Level 2 Certificate – Playwork: Principles into Practice (P³)* will be available.

The new qualification, which has been developed in partnership with Addysg Oedolion Cymru | Adult Learning Wales, will provide a proportionate and effective progression route for playworkers working in a non-supervisory role. It replaces our previous Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) P³ level 2 qualification.

The Level 2 P³ has been designed to meet the requirements of face-to-face playworkers and is based on sector feedback. To be accepted onto the course you will need to have completed or be in the process of completing the Level 2

Award in Playwork Practice (L2APP) qualification.

The new qualification includes content on: practical playwork, reflective practice, play and development, safeguarding and working with others.

We are also developing a new *Level 3 Diploma Playwork: Principles into Practice* which will be available for delivery in 2020 and is aimed at playwork managers and supervisors. The complete suite of qualifications has been designed to provide a coherent progression route for playworkers:

- Agored Cymru Level 2 Award in Playwork Practice (L2APP)
- Agored Cymru Level 2 Certificate Playwork: Principles into Practice (Level 2 P³)
- Agored Cymru Level 3 Diploma Playwork: Principles into Practice (Level 3 P³).

If you are a playworker and would like to progress to the Level 2 P³ we would like to hear from you. Contact us at workforce@playwales.org.uk to discuss entry requirements and how to register your interest.

Flintshire School Life Conference

As part of plans to engage with schools regarding play sufficiency, Flintshire County Council worked with Play Wales and Ludicology to deliver the School Life conference at Theatr Clwyd, Mold in November 2018.



A range of delegates from the education, schools, youth, play and public health sectors attended the conference which looked at the ways schools can improve children's opportunities for playing.

'The content was extremely informative and enabled us to collaborate as a group and share discussions and ideas.'

Delegate

The conference got off to a great start with a welcome address from the local authority's Chief Officer for Education and Youth, Claire Homard. Delegates were then updated on the national

policy context, how loose parts play materials can help to support children's play and what the research tells us about the benefits of playing. Practical examples followed with contributions from schools, the local authority's play development team and the playful schools programme.

Delegates were also signposted to a range of Play Wales resources that can be used to support schools, including the *Use of school grounds for playing out of teaching hours* toolkit, the *Resources for playing – providing loose parts to support children's play toolkit* and the *Right to Play in Schools Workshop* resources. All are available to download at: www.playwales.org.uk/eng/publications

'Very informative sessions which helped all delegates to understand the importance of play in schools.'

Delegate

Increasingly, local play teams are working with schools on the link between play, physical activity and mental well-being. Play Wales can advise on events like this and how they can support the professional development of the wider play workforce and encourage professionals to take action on children's play.

Playful communities

Lunchtime play at Ysgol Tŷ Ffynnon

Schools across Wales are working with play organisations to improve playtime. Popular interventions include the provision of loose parts during lunchtime play, alongside support for midday supervisors to support them.

Ysgol Tŷ Ffynnon opened nearly five years ago due to the amalgamation of Shotton Infant School and Taliesin Junior School in Deeside. At School Life, a conference held to promote play in schools in Flintshire, Thomas and Michalina, and two of their teachers talked about lunchtime play in their school.

Mr. Shepherd, Deputy Headteacher at the school reports that staff were noticing problems with playtime, *'In particular, there were a lack of activities at lunchtime, which meant that children were easily falling out. This led to a great deal of time spent on investigating incidents by teachers on a regular basis, which impacted on teaching and learning time. The outdoor play space was a sparse area with not much for the children to do. The space encouraged running which meant lots of children were crashing into one another, which resulted in a high number of accident forms being filled in.'*

During 2016/17 school year an initiative, called Playful Futures, for lunchtime play was introduced. This is a project where loose parts play materials are provided in a specific shed to enable pupils to use them during playtime for richer play experiences. All staff were given training and support on how to

implement the project. Older children are Play Champions, who help to get the play materials out and to put them away. Working with a consultant, the school implemented a programme to create higher quality play experiences for children at playtime.

Michalina explained, *'Before the play shed was built, most of the children thought that playtime wasn't very good and could be better. But, now that we have the play shed, almost everyone thinks playtime is good'*. Thomas talked about some of things that other children had said about playtime:

'I look forward to lunchtimes now.'

'We get to make dens and see who has designed the best!'

'I have loads of friends to play with now.'

Together, the school identified a range of benefits from better opportunities at playtime. In particular, Mr. Shepherd reports *'fewer behavioural issues, with forty percent less accident forms being used per week'*.

Across Wales organisations and groups run play projects or make sure children have opportunities to play in their communities. In each issue, we will be sharing an example of a project that's helping to make a community more playful.

The examples may:

- Be close to where you live so you can visit them
- Inspire you with ideas about things you could do in your community
- Help you make the case for play in your local area.

For more examples of playful communities in Wales visit:
www.playfulchildhoods.wales/about-playful-communities

