The Benefits of Play and Playwork

Recent evidence-based research (2001 – 2006) demonstrating the impact and benefits of play and playwork

Beth Manwaring & Chris Taylor
Much of the time most of us continue unwittingly with our frivolous play pursuits, unaware that we are despised by others except when the hegemony of those others suddenly makes itself felt as forms of rudeness, censorship, banishment, annulment or cancellation.

In scholarship the denigration of play in intellectual terms is shown by the absence of the key term play from the index of almost every book about the behaviour of human beings. It is true that increased research attention has been given to play within psychology in recent decades, and within biology throughout this century, but there is still much more resistance to the subject than is justified, given its universal role in human behaviour. From my point of view, regarding play as frivolous is itself a frivolous gesture.


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1. Introduction

Pay Up for Play

The Community and Youth Workers’ Union (CYWU) first had a playwork representative on its national executive committee in the late nineteen forties.

Since that time we have slowly but surely campaigned for a number of things: we believe that playwork should be recognised by society so that it achieves significant public investment and is able to function as a statutory service with a permanent funding base: we believe that those delivering this provision should be trained to the highest standards: once being trained we believe that playworkers should be considered highly qualified professionals with a professional rate of pay.

We have been delighted to work with SkillsActive and other partners to ensure that there is a robust national qualifications framework in place and more funding for playwork. We have been pleased to support dozens of playworkers in their workplaces and to campaign with them for more investment and better terms and conditions. We have enjoyed good relationships with many MPs, MSPs and AMs and members of the House of Lords in promoting progressive policies to expand play services.

We then felt it was time to take stock and consider two things. We wanted to commission some research into the cutting edge, most up to date arguments that justify more public investment in playwork. This excellent report is a product of that intention.

Our second great hope is that playworkers will eventually square the circle and join us in a campaign to raise the level of salaries of playworkers. Only by doing this will we consolidate ourselves into a profession. If we do this we will gain the status we deserve as skilled practitioners. Improving our status will benefit the children with whom we work immeasurably.

I appeal to all readers of this report to assist us in fulfilling this last essential requirement. Join us and play your part in the Pay Up for Play campaign in 2007.

I am sure that you will find this report and Union membership of use to you.

Doug Nicholls
General Secretary
The Community and Youth Workers’ Union

www.cywu.org.uk
Defining Play, Playwork and Play Settings

Play is a form of behaviour, which has been recognised throughout time. Playwork is an emerging profession which can arguably be traced back to the mid-Victorian era. Play settings can be as old as the natural environment or as new as the most recently opened extended school.

This research focuses on the inextricable relationship between play, playwork and the playwork setting. Whilst modest in scope, in terms of time, the availability of research and current funding, it feels useful at the outset to state the epistemological orientations of the work.

Studies that concern themselves with human behaviour, work and social settings tend to be found within three broad traditions: the scientific, social constructionist and applied approaches. These three traditions characterise the study of childhood and provide a useful orientation for future research into play and playwork.

The scientific approach – as exemplified by developmental psychology and evolutionary/social biology has tended to dominate contemporary understandings of play within playwork. Such an approach sees play as an innate, instinctive, driven form of behaviour, which is essential to life, evolution, growth and development. For example, within playwork, the widely accepted definition of play is:

Freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated, [behaviour] that is, performed for no external goal or reward (Play Education 1982).

This is accompanied by a typology of some sixteen play types1 that have been identified as an elaboration of the nature of play, indicating the importance and complexity of the focus of playwork, and which for this project invite the question: how are specific play types correlated with specific benefits?

The scientific method characterises this approach and includes: observation, experimentation, demonstration and verification, and inclines to quantitative methodologies and evidence.

The social constructionist approach is a much ‘newer’ or younger approach concerned with the study of everyday life and processes of ‘human meaning-making’.

The nature and value attached to children’s play has changed over time, and varies within and between cultures.

Social understandings are framed through discourses that explain and justify social institutions and behaviour and can inform social action and interaction. The methodologies of this tradition are qualitative, and include observation, ethnography and discourse analysis and deconstruction. The aim is not to demonstrate truth through evidence, but rather to explore taken-for-granted assumptions and values that underpin everyday life, to think about things differently, and explore potentialities for change.

Within playwork, there is increasing concern about the nature and processes of the construction of the knowledge base of the profession, and with the telling of stories, as a methodology for sharing practice and developing the profession as a practice open to study.

To an extent Sutton-Smith (1999) in The Ambiguity of Play, adopts a multi-disciplinary approach to uncover the ideological rhetoric that characterises theories of play from a diversity of disciplines, employing a methodology with a social constructionist ‘flavour’: “of the rhetorics of that play that can illuminate our understanding of it” this complementing his essentially evolutionary/scientific approach to the study of play. His work exemplifies the value of different traditions to the study of play.

The applied approach lies somewhere between the academic discipline of childhood studies and the daily practice of playwork and can be broadly characterised by two dimensions:

Firstly commitments to the UNCRC2 and to all children’s rights in many cases, especially those relating to children’s participation as well as to preventative, protective and provision rights. A rights-based approach sits easily with a child-centred profession advocating the rights of the child to play.

Secondly, reflective practice is valued highly by playwork and involves the linking of experience in practice with theory, in order to inform improvement and future action.

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1 Hughes, B. (1996) A Playworker’s Taxonomy of Play Types, PLAYLINK
2 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
The playwork profession has the potential for expansion and is hungry for a theoretical base that informs the development of practice. In this context the practitioner will adopt a pragmatic approach to the selection of theory from either of the traditions, with a healthy tendency to value that which works in practice. There is also a growing tendency for playworkers to develop their own theories based on observation and practice, and increasingly ‘story-telling’.

It is believed that a multi-disciplinary approach to understanding play, complemented by a diversity of epistemological and methodological approaches will be in the best interests of play, playwork and the development of playwork settings.

Defining Playwork

It might be claimed, with some caution, that there is a considerable degree of consensus and acceptance of the generic description of playwork as being:

“a term used to describe working professionally with children through play.”

or as:

“a highly skilled profession that enriches and enhances children’s play.”

More specifically, Brown (2000) in Playwork Theory and Practice defines playwork as:

“the specific act of affecting the whole environment with the deliberate intention of improving opportunities for play.”

A useful distinction can be made between understandings of playwork as:

“a methodology i.e. distinct way of working with children – the art and science of facilitating children’s play.”

and:

“a service delivered by adults for children, either through people, places or a combination of both.”

In presenting the findings, from the evidence-based and related researches, such definitions are used somewhat loosely and interchangeably.

Defining Play Settings

The diversity that characterises the provision of children’s services unsurprisingly influences and is reflected in descriptions of the play setting. There is a sense within the profession of play settings simply being the provision of services, with the primary purpose being play provision for children such as, adventure playgrounds, play centres and holiday play schemes. There is also a view that play can be provided in specific settings (e.g. hospitals, refuges, children’s homes, prisons), that play can be taken to outdoor environments (e.g. play rangers and mobile play provision), and that play happens inevitably in out-of-school provision. This links to contemporary debates about the Every Child Matters agenda, out-of-school care and extended schools.

Implications for the Research Review

A number of factors have had an impact on this research project and are worth setting out below to provide a context for the literature review:

• The difficulties of defining play for research and other purposes are well documented and bring complexity to the task;
• There is a shortage of evidence-based research into the benefits of play amongst children over five and teenagers;
• There is an established literature of play theory drawn from a diversity of traditions, though primarily from the scientific tradition;
• There are few studies of the impacts of playwork (related to the relatively young status of the profession);
• There is a need for more research into the nature and benefits of play and playwork;
• The emergence of forms of play provision seem to be contingent upon a range of external variables, political agendas, policy commitments, local conditions and to an increasing degree responsiveness to programmes of advocacy for play;

6 Ibid.
The benefits of play and playwork

- Definitions of play within the research review have been contextualised to the topic under review e.g. social play refers to social play types and assumptions and anecdotes about its benefits;
- All available/found research is included, which has various degrees of rigour;
- Gaps in research are highlighted;
- Attention is given to appropriate methodologies given the context of play and its complexities.

Some Observations

The project has revealed an increasingly well-documented identification of the limited availability of evidence-based research documenting the benefits of play and playwork (see Making the Case for Play and Realising the Potential: The case for cultural services – Play summarised in Appendix Two).

Existing evidence focuses on the links between play and child development and agendas relating to the changing nature of childhood and the contemporary experiences of children.

The topics included in this research review relate to contemporary agendas within playwork, for example, the relationship between play and social/personal development, the impacts of play deprivation, and in terms of public policy, the relationship between play and children’s health and childhood obesity. These contemporary agendas also include the expansion of out-of-school care, and the changing face of childhood services, e.g. extended schools and reform of the children’s workforce through the Every Child Matters agenda.

This project is modest in terms of time and funding and therefore it is not ‘fully comprehensive’. Areas such as risk, community development and others have not been included. However, hopefully, this work is one of many early steps towards the development of a broader and stronger awareness of the evidence base for the benefits of children’s play and particularly of staffed provision.
2. The Education and Learning Benefits of Play and Playwork

Play and Playwork in an Education and Learning Context

The cognitive benefits of play have characterised the writings of developmental psychologists, with Piaget seeing play as a mechanism for the consolidation of skills, and Vygotsky their application and extension.

More contemporaneously, play is recognised for the important contribution it makes to education and lifelong learning, a finding confirmed by many studies of early childhood. Research prior to 2001 with animals found that play can enhance problem solving; it is also widely regarded as providing opportunities for social interaction and language development. The contribution of play to educational development is suggested through the inherent value of different play types e.g. through risk taking and exploratory play in formal and informal settings, allowing children to experiment, try new things and push their boundaries. Research also suggests that “the learning outcomes from play are enhanced when play is ‘properly directed’” by adults.

The other area of focus for the impact of play and playwork on education and learning is the role of play at school break periods and the impact on children’s behaviour and learning in class. One of the current concerns voiced in the media is children’s opportunities for imaginative play and its educational benefits being limited because of the demands of the school curriculum threatening to make school playtimes shorter.

Taking risks, experimenting and pushing boundaries is an important part of growing up. Young people need opportunities to learn about their world in ways that provide challenge and excitement through positive things to do and opportunities to play.


Playing...allows children to make mistakes and learn through trial and errors, which again helps them to recognise their limitations, as well as to discover their abilities. If play becomes too safe, it is not only predictable and boring, it also limits children’s practical experiences of risk management, and hence their ability to recognise and deal with risky situations.


List of Findings

- Research into role play and imaginative play in the school environment shows that uninterrupted play benefits children’s learning. The complexity of the play is dependent on the provision of time, space and choice in the classroom. “Our observations of role play particularly between peers show that high quality role play can provide opportunities for complex cognitive and social development” (Rogers 2005).

This evidence is usually discussed in the context of the school curriculum putting pressure on children’s time for play.

- Freedom to play in the natural environment contributes to a child’s development including their physical and emotional well-being and learning. A Child’s Place recognised clear learning outcomes from outdoor activities pursued by children, including:
  - Communicating and negotiating with others (especially in the playground)
  - Responsibility for others (e.g. younger siblings)
  - Curiosity in living things
  - Story-telling, magic and myths (especially in relation to secret places).

(Thomas and Thompson 2004)
Evaluation of three Forest Schools by Forest Research and the New Economics Foundation found that play in a woodland environment increased children’s knowledge and understanding of the natural environment and gave them the confidence “to develop a responsible independence… and initiate their own play and learning” (Murray and O’Brien 2005).

Forest Schools also increased children’s language development and communication skills by facilitating spontaneous talk and the use of descriptive language through children’s freedom to explore and play in the outdoors. The environment inspired children to learn through experimenting with language in imaginative play and encouraged children who had otherwise been reluctant to join in to increase their access to learning through discovery with their peers.

The Better Play Evaluation found that children learnt new, and improved existing, practical and social skills through play: “Practical skills were learned experientially, while social skills were learned through activities and interaction with others”. Furthermore “all the projects showed that children had gained or improved practical skills, social skills and levels of knowledge and understanding” (Youlden and Harrison 2006). Practical skills described by the evaluation included: physical and motor skills, model making, cooking and arts and crafts activities. Social skills included: teamwork, communication, listening skills, turn-taking and cooperation.

Learning is linked to different play types, for example, exploratory play, imaginative play and opportunities for challenge and risk all enhance learning. Better Play found that playworkers were influential in this process and “staffed play opportunities gave children the opportunity to try new activities, take risks and extend boundaries in a supported environment” (Youlden and Harrison 2006).

Play facilitated by playworkers can maximise children’s education and learning benefits. The skills and knowledge of the staff in the Better Play evaluation were key to the child’s learning: “The key influences on learning and knowledge were found to be the staff, working with external partners, equipment and tools, the type of activities available and the projects’ overall aims” (Youlden and Harrison 2006).

Play projects have been found to give parents and carers opportunities to learn about their children’s play through observation. This was a finding of the Better Play Evaluation and was the focus of recent study by the Next Generation Foundation (NGF). The NGF found that parents could learn about their children’s play through observation and by playing alongside them, which benefited parents’ understanding of their children’s behaviour and encouraged them to engage in their children’s learning through play in non-institutional settings (Thomas and Bradburne 2006).

Recent Sources for Education and Learning Benefits
2 Rogers, S. (2005) Role Play in Reception Classes, Economic and Social Research Council

Gaps/Future Research Projects
- Long-term research building on the large body of knowledge about the benefits of play to learning in early years that looks at the continued impact of play on learning and education through 5 – 15 year olds. There is a gap in research that clearly separates the early years from older children.
- The benefits of play to the learning of children with special educational needs.
- The benefits and methods of adult-directed play on learning.
3. The Health and Well-Being Benefits of Play and Playwork

Play and Playwork in a Health and Well-Being Context

Play is often recognised for its contribution to physical health and emotional well-being. Traditionally the health benefits of play are recognised as the physical activity involved in playing energetically and play enhancing the mental health of children and young people.

Play is recognised for the valuable contribution it can make to increasing children’s physical activity levels and helping children to achieve the government’s recommended 60 minutes of at least moderate intensity physical activity each day. The Chief Medical Officer notes that “active play involving carrying, climbing, rough and tumble will help develop and maintain muscular fitness and flexibility” and recognises the role of “education professionals and play leaders to encourage children and young people of all abilities, shapes and sizes to take part in sports and activities that engage them throughout life.”

The mental health contribution of play can be seen not only through the play therapy discipline which is used for treating emotional and behavioural difficulties and helping children to deal with traumatic events, but also through unstructured freely-chosen play contributing to children’s emotional health and well-being, for example, by providing challenge and choice. Evidence from the Mental Health Foundation’s Bright Futures Inquiry in 1999 found that factors like poverty, social isolation and a lack of strong relationships have a negative impact on children’s mental health but “positive or resilience factors” balance these, of which play is a key factor. It is noted that opportunities to play including taking risks and testing boundaries build children’s confidence, self-esteem and resilience in more than just the short term.

...letting children go out to play is one of the best things that parents can do for their children’s health.


...we are all aware of the “five portions a day” concept as it applies to fruit and vegetables, let me suggest that as well as those five portions a day, children should be given the opportunity to engage in a minimum of three portions of play a day.


List of Findings

- Commentators recognise that the rise in obesity amongst children could be linked to decreasing levels of physical activity, with one of the contributory factors children’s unsupervised play outdoors being limited by parents worried about traffic danger and ‘stranger danger’, as well as inequality of access to quality green spaces across the UK. Evidence from children finds that they would like more opportunities to play out. In a BMRB survey for the Children’s Play Council and The Children’s Society 39% of children said that they do not play out as much as they would like to.

- Playing (unstructured ball games and general outdoor play) is one of the most effective ways of ensuring that children get the physical activity they need. The number of activity calories burnt by children playing was second only to those consumed during school PE and games lessons. Furthermore children were more likely to walk to play at play provision or outdoor space, increasing the intensity of the activity and leading the researcher to conclude that: “Walking and playing provide children with more physical activity than most other activities” (Mackett 2004).

- Children’s contact with the outdoors and use of the natural environment for exploratory activities, including play, contributes to their emotional and psychological well-being, including “letting off steam, shouting and running, quiet reflection, confiding in others and being with family members and pets” (Thomas and Thompson 2004).

8 Chief Medical Officer (2004) At Least Five a Week: Evidence on the impact of physical activity and its relationship to health, Department of Health
9 Mental Health Foundation, Bright Futures, Mental Health Foundation
• Playground interventions can help to increase children’s physical activity levels. There is evidence to show that “Skipping and typical playground games stimulated by painting playgrounds can significantly increase children’s physical activity in the short-term” (Stratton 2002). Along with playground markings it was also suggested that children need stimulation in the form of prompts from teachers or parents to enable them to be more physically active.

• Evaluation of The Better Play Programme found that projects fostered both physical and psychological health and well-being in children. Play projects gave children opportunities for physical play and exercise and supported children’s psychological well-being through increasing children’s confidence levels, satisfaction, pride and sense of self worth and as a result self-esteem. Staff skills and knowledge were found to impact on the level to which projects could actively address children’s health and well-being.

• In a recent review of children’s natural play, evidence sources are cited to support the contribution of play to children’s physical and mental health and well-being. The report summaries that: “The powerful combination of a diversity of play experiences and direct contact with nature has direct benefits for children’s physical, mental and emotional health. Free play opportunities in natural settings offer possibilities for restoration, and hence, well-being. Collectively, the benefits fully support the outcomes established in Every Child Matters” (Lester and Maudsley 2006).

• The Better Play Evaluation recognises the important role of staff in ensuring children’s safety and well-being whilst providing a balance between “the need to offer risk and keep children safe”. Better Play also gives an example of how on-going training and support can further equip staff and provide them “with the necessary knowledge skills and experiences to manage situations, to facilitate appropriate activities and provide individual support where necessary”. This was found to impact on “both physical and psychological well-being” of the children.

Recent Sources for Health and Well-Being Benefits


Gaps/Future Research Projects

• The role of playtime supervisors and playworkers in increasing the physical activity levels of children through play.
• The long-term impacts on mental health of reduced opportunities to play on children and young people.
4. The Economic Benefits of Play and Playwork

Play and Playwork in an Economic Context

It is hard to think about children’s play in terms of economics as play settings are not usually profit driven and consequently the economic benefits are hard to define. Existing literature and research sees children’s play as a benefit in the lives of children who are economically disadvantaged by providing a protective and compensatory factor in their quality of life. Play opportunities can also help to regenerate an area and provide local employment.

Play settings can be seen as providing childcare for parents and thus giving them the opportunity to go out to work or undertake education and training. There was no existing research evidence found that assessed the positive affect of play as a factor in producing economically productive adults of the future but discursively it is believed that play has a long-term positive effect on children’s lives.

Out of School Care (OSC) services are both direct and indirect economic contributors. They offer a direct contribution in the form of the creation of a small business, the creation of local employment and financial gains to the local economy as a whole. OSC are indirect contributors because of the service they provide to enable parents to take up paid work or training.


Good quality play spaces provide opportunities for children and families to meet and interact, to have fun, and can provide valuable learning opportunities. In concert with other environmental improvements, they help in providing a better quality of life for all residents.


The poor provision of play spaces for children and young people is a crucial issue for many deprived areas in England. Outdoor play is essential for young children’s healthy growth and development and children’s right to play...


When young people have safe places to play in and hang out; well-maintained and affordable facilities to use; activities to take part in; good quality support services to turn to; and good schools to go to, then their communities are also likely to feel safe, vibrant and supportive for everyone.


List of Findings

- Children living in areas of high deprivation often have limited access to outdoor spaces at home or at school, consequently poverty is cited as one of the factors that limit children and young people’s access to outdoor spaces and play opportunities: “…children’s ability to experience the natural environment is under threat. Fear and risk, lack of investment, overcrowding and poverty are all restricting their opportunities to spend time outside” (Thomas and Thompson 2004).

- Existing research finds that inequalities exist in access to good quality play provision because of social and economic disadvantage. Research conducted by Demos and the Green Alliance found “a big gap in equality of access to high quality natural environments between children from rural backgrounds and children from urban backgrounds”.

One of their key recommendations is that children from disadvantaged backgrounds should be provided with more and better opportunities to good quality open space (Thomas and Thompson 2004).

- Play opportunities that are free to use contribute to children and young people’s and their family’s economic well-being. In consultations with children and young people they cite the cost of play and youth opportunities and of transport to and from them, as barriers to participation (Young Londoner’s Survey 2004).

- Through evaluative research and consultation new play projects have been shown to make a significant difference to New Deal for Communities areas including: “promoting social interaction and providing a sense of community ownership” in deprived neighbourhoods where provision of play spaces was previously poor (Barraclough, Bennington and Green 2004).

- The Better Play Evaluation recognised that staffed play provision can “offer voluntary work and employment opportunities to local children and adults” (Youlden and Harrison 2006).

- The results of a literature review commissioned by the Scottish Executive found that out-of-school care services, including after school clubs, holiday play schemes, breakfast clubs, kids clubs, play centres, play schemes, play clubs and play camps, have significant economic benefits, especially to parents and carers through providing employment and childcare to enable parents to take up training opportunities. All of the economic benefits identified in the Scottish Executive report are reproduced below:

**Parents and carers**
- Access to employment, education and training
- Increased or stable earnings
- Decreased dependency on benefits
- Increase in working hours
- Movement from part-time to full-time working
- Increased ability to do job and increased satisfaction
- Less unplanned absences
- Promotion or better job.

**Children**
- Assumed economic benefits from parents’ access to earnings.

**Communities**
- Contribute to tackling poverty, disadvantage and regeneration
- Creation of positive environment for children
- Employment creation and opportunities in OSC.

**Employers**
- Reduction in recruitment costs
- Better retention rates e.g. mothers more likely to return from maternity leave
- Investment in training and staff development programs recouped
- Reduction in unplanned absences
- Wider pool of potential recruits for jobs
- Employment creation in OSC

(Blake Stevenson Ltd 2003).
Recent Sources for Economic Benefits


Gaps/Future Research Projects

- Research that specifically identifies the costs/benefits of play opportunities, as opposed to childcare in general, which forms the bulk of the evidence in England.
- The impact of play on children in the long term and its contribution to well-rounded individuals who are economically active and successful as adults.
- Retrospective studies into the links between play experiences and career destinations.
- Research to assess the impact of the large voluntary workforce in playwork and their likelihood to move into paid employment in the playwork sector.
- The positive impact of quality green spaces to children in economically disadvantaged areas has been researched but there is little evidence about the impact of staffed play provision, mobile play facilities or outreach workers such as play rangers in economically disadvantaged areas.
- How play contributes to workforce development by improving the skills and qualifications of the workforce, both for employment in the playwork and childcare sectors as well as in other industries.
5. The Social Benefits of Play and Playwork

Play and Playwork in a Social Context

Children make friends through their play. Playworkers provide environments and opportunities for play, as well as stimulating activities, events and involvements with children during play. The play environment, and organised games and group activities bring children together; the role of the playworker involves observing play and becoming involved in its relational aspects.

The social benefits discussed below are seen to refer to the development of positive social relationships leading to greater tolerance, acceptance of difference and understanding between children as well as to friendships. In a general sense they also refer to social bonding, citizenship and community cohesion, as well as to social inclusion agendas relating to disability.

The workers are welcoming (and) are great with the children and spend time talking to them, which really helps them socially.


The more successful schools are in achieving inclusive outcomes for their pupils, the better are the chances that these young people will go on to prosper in later life and achieve broader social inclusion in society.


List of Findings

• An evaluation of six supervised playwork projects in relation to Best Play objective six found that all projects evaluated met the following criterion: “The provision fosters children’s respect for others and offers opportunities for social interaction”. It was found that social interactions between peers sometimes occurred naturally through play and at other times required support from staff. The staff interacted with children as a friend and as a leader/rule-maker, which led to mutual respect. Children saw play projects as a place to go with friends, to meet friends, to make new friends and in some cases to meet new groups.

• In the Lets Play Together evaluation (of eight inclusion projects) parents reported feeling positive about the opportunities provided naturally and through the encouragement of workers in the setting to facilitate play and interaction between children.

• An observational study of play in six primary school playgrounds in Yorkshire found that “Disabled children were involved in many types of play and their inclusion was often facilitated by themselves, by other children or by staff and sometimes included the adaptation of play” (Woolby et al 2006).

• An action-based research study into the introduction of play to disabled and non-disabled children included introducing play through playwork into school settings and taking children to York Adventure Playground in Edinburgh. It involved teachers and support workers who reported improved relationships with children and a better understanding and appreciation of the cultural worlds they created through their play.

• Extensive research into the benefits of out-of-school-care (OSC) noted:

Increasing literature in the UK and internationally is beginning to highlight and provide evidence for the social benefits of childcare and OSC. Given that a parallel aim of OSC is to provide a safe environment for children to play, it is not surprising that one of the most evidenced social benefits of OSC is that of play opportunities for children.

• A report by Blake Stevenson Ltd (2003) for the Scottish Executive assessing the benefits and costs of out-of-school care identified a diversity of perceived social benefits including:
  - Social interaction between children of diverse groups (in terms of needs, ages and ethnicity) was found and seen to be particularly important for ‘only’ children and those from rural areas. It broadened experiences and skills and consultation opportunities with children;
  - Parents and carers were found to gain support and advice, respite and time off, stress reduction in the family and to gain social interaction themselves through entering or spending more time at work;
  - Communities were seen to benefit from the development of citizenship. Out-of-school-care was an alternative to anti-social behaviour through the social inclusion of families and stronger links between families and schools and the community;
  - Schools enjoyed greater popularity and better relations with the community, there was an increased integration of services and out-of-school-care complementing the school-learning environment.

• A retrospective, research video project Reflections on Adventure shows interviews with young adults (mid 20s – 30s) discussing the positive impacts of an adventure playground on their lives. This relates to critical thinking, citizenship, self confidence and personal identity and esteem, and to the health benefits of play (Palmer 2002).

Recent Sources for Social Benefits

Gaps/Future Research Projects
• The importance of friendships in children’s play.
• Further research into the links between play, playwork and the community.
• The role of playwork in agendas relating to social justice.
• Play in diversity including the role of playwork in relation to age, gender, ethnicity and disability.
Play and Playwork in a Developmental and Behavioural Context

Playworkers seek to provide play environments that offer materials that make play possible and provide developmental stimulation – this is seen to link to the social, physical, intellectual, creative/cultural and emotional development of the child – commonly referred to by the acronym SPICE:

- Social development e.g. making and playing with friends, learning how to share and relate informally with adults;
- Physical development e.g. playing on structures, fixed play equipment, natural features of the setting, playing games and engaging in spontaneous sport;
- Intellectual development e.g. through problem solving, for example, through den building and language games;
- Creative/cultural e.g. making things, paintings, go-karts, jewellery, celebrating cultural events and festivals;
- Emotional development of the self and others e.g. through playing together, sharing, experiencing risk, frustration and a full range of feelings.

Play, playwork and child development often tend to be seen as synonymous. Developmental psychology, perhaps unsurprisingly, provides a plethora of evidence-based research to demonstrate the relevance of play to aspects of development, particularly in the early years. Recent playwork theorising has directed attention to the processes involved in play. Brown (2002) describes the development of compound flexibility as a spiral of problem solving through interaction with the environment that leads to increased self-esteem and exploration. This process brings increased flexibility and adaptability and provides a basis for the idea that play per se is developmental.

If a child is playing there is room for a symptom or two, and if a child is able to enjoy play, both alone and with other children, there is no very serious trouble afoot. If in this play is employed a rich imagination, and if also, pleasure is got from games that depend on exact perception of external reality, then you can be fairly happy, even if the child in question is wetting the bed, stammering, displaying temper tantrums, or repeatedly suffering from bilious attacks or depression. The playing shows that this child is capable, given reasonably good and stable surroundings, of developing a personal way of life, and eventually of becoming a whole human being, wanted as such and welcomed by the world at large.


Play is a child’s work

Isaacs, S. (1929) The Nursery Years, Routledge Introductions to Modern Knowledge

The realisation that play is essential for normal development has slowly but surely permeated our cultural heritage.

Department for the Environment Report 1973

Children being seen and heard in public places is one of the hallmarks of a vital city.


Play is a necessity, not a luxury. There is much overcrowded housing in this area, which increases the need for playgrounds and open spaces like these. It is great news that local parents have reported a marked improvement in their children’s behaviour and development since this new facility has been open.

Play is a necessity, not a luxury. There is much overcrowded housing in this area, which increases the need for playgrounds and open spaces like these. It is great news that local parents have reported a marked improvement in their children's behaviour and development since this new facility has been open.

David Lammy, minister for the Department for Culture Media and Sport, London Play News Release (28/10/2005)
Minister responsible for play visits the only adventure playground in his constituency

List of Findings
• An evaluation of six play projects (representative case studies derived from 225 play projects) found that the Better Play objective to foster “the development of self-esteem, well-being, healthy growth and development, knowledge, understanding, creativity and capacity to learn” were being met.
  - Practical skills were learned experientially and social skills through activities and interaction with others.
  - Psychological well-being was being developed in terms of the children’s levels of self-confidence, satisfaction, pride and self-worth as well as self-esteem. Children remarked that “coming here makes me feel better about myself” and “the playworkers make me feel good – they help me and my mates”.
  - Children and their contributions to the projects were encouraged, respected and valued by the workers, and children frequently reported positively about the staff and their relationships with them.
  - The key influences on creativity and learning were found to be the staff, working with equipment and tools, the types of activities on offer and the overall aims of the project.
  - Children reported: “I had heard of Diwali before, but I didn’t know what it was” and “I learned how to make a witch out of clay.”
• Evaluations and observations of inclusive projects (involving disabled and non-disabled children), found that play led to social development and improvements in language and communication (Ludvigsen et al 2006, Casey 2002 and Woolby et al 2006).
• Many studies identify a decline in play opportunities for children or an erosion of their play. Danger from traffic is cited as a key reason for the reduction in outdoor play. “Since the private motorcar began to dominate the street, play policy has been built around this great social and spatial vacuum. In the battle for terrain between the motorist and the child, the driver won” (Worpole 2005). There are now 32 million cars on the streets of Britain (Hansard 2005) compared with 8 million children aged between 5 and 15 years (Annual Abstract of Statistics 2005).
• A Mori survey for the Audit Commission (2001) showed adults ranked “activities for young people” as the single most requested improvement in local services – 45% of adults wanted activities for teenagers and 25% of adults mentioned facilities for younger children.
• A Groundwork Research Report (2002) to the Urban Green Spaces Task Force cited in No Particular Place to Go? Children, Young People and Public Space noted that:
  “Young people are often reported as the perpetrators of crime and yet it is clear that in terms of parks and green spaces, they see themselves as the victims. They suffer anti-social behaviour in the form of bullying from other age groups, but also on the part of adults, ranging from the possibilities of attack in unlit areas to adults allowing their dogs to roam loose in children’s play areas”.
• Learning through Landscapes Grounds for Celebration Study of 100 schools in Greater London (cited in No Particular Place to Go? Children, Young People and Public Space Part 11) reported on the development of playgrounds for more creative, educational and social use and found that:
  - 52% of schools reported a decline in playtime bullying
  - 30% of schools reported a reduction in vandalism
  - 80% of schools claimed to have seen improvements in behaviour and interactions among pupils.
The benefits of play and playwork

- In a case study cited in No Particular Place to Go? Children, Young People and Public Space, over the course of two trips organised by the Ryde Development Trust more than 40 children visited Crumbles Castle Adventure Playground in North London and Mile End Park in East London, to look at play and park facilities. They were greatly enthused by both visits, but particularly by the Crumbles Adventure Playground, not only because it had both indoor and outdoor facilities but also because it was staffed.

- A Scottish study of out-of-school care found that children gained increased confidence, self-esteem and motivation from attending out-of-school-care schemes – as well as enjoying themselves and having fun. It was felt that parent/carers gained from peace of mind that their children were in safe settings, and communities benefited from the development of citizenship and out-of-school-care as an alternative to anti-social behaviour (Blake Stevenson Ltd 2003).

- Play is beneficial to children in adverse settings; play has been used to reduce/mediate the developmental impact of procedures and settings such as in hospitals and for children visiting parents in prison (Andrews 2005).

- A research report to evaluate playwork with children with challenging behaviour in Nottingham suggests that playworkers applying understandings derived from play theory to the behaviour of these children led to a positive change; an increased capacity to play and a reduction of the challenging nature of their behaviour (Russell 2006).

Recent Sources for Developmental and Behavioural Benefits


Gaps/Future Research Projects

- Research into the relevance of play to lifespan development.
- The nature of the relationship between community cohesion and the delivery of play services.
- The impacts of the introduction (or withdrawal) of play services on crime in the community.
- Studies of play and development in relation to the middle childhood and teenage years.
- The nature of play as a developmental process.
- The role of playwork in facilitating development.
- The role of play services in reducing the isolation of disabled children.
- Evaluation of impacts of new play services upon relationships within communities.
7. The Negative Results of Play Deprivation

Play and Playwork in a Play Deprivation Context

Play deprivation is the name given to the notion that not playing may deprive children of experiences that are regarded as developmentally essential and result in those affected being both biologically and socially disabled (Hughes 2003).

Play deprivation is referred to by Hughes (2000) as the result of “a chronic lack of sensory interaction with the world: a form of sensory deprivation” it may also be the result of “a neurotic, erratic interaction.”

‘Play bias’ refers to: “a loading of play in one area of experience or another – having the effect of excluding the child for some parts of the total play experience with potential detrimental effects” (Hughes 2000).

Play deprivation, play bias and stimulation theory provide a theoretical orientation to the study of the nature and impacts of play and its absence. At the same time the concept of play deprivation can be seen as the flip side of the benefits of play. The concept of play deprivation has proven useful both as a basis for theorising, and as an applied concept for the advocacy of play and playwork. The playworker is ideally placed to identify and address play bias and deprivation.

Then pity the monkeys who are not permitted to play, and pray that all children will always be allowed to play.


List of Findings

- Hughes writing in a briefing paper for Play Wales on play deprivation refers to five main study areas in play deprivation and states the following:
  - If normal play experiences are absent throughout a child’s life, that child is more likely to become highly violent and anti-social regardless of demography.
  - If children are kept in and not allowed out to play, they experience play deprivation and are likely to manifest symptoms ranging from aggression and repressed emotions and social skills to an increased risk of obesity.
  - When children are chronically play deprived as one aspect of a life of almost continuous sensory deprivation they suffer symptoms ranging from depression and withdrawal to a gradual loss of all electrical activity in the brain.
  - The ages of 0–7 are seen developmentally as the “sensitive period” for neurological growth and play deprivation during this period is considered likely to be particularly damaging.
  - Studies have reported that play is essential for brain development, implying that play deprivation will adversely affect brain growth. A US study reported devastating effects of play deprivation on Romanian orphans, linking them to reduction in the brain size of the affected children (Tobin 1997).


Play stands at the centre of human development, especially in the formative years, but its importance has to be defended by each generation anew often on different grounds.


List of Findings

- Hughes writing in a briefing paper for Play Wales on play deprivation refers to five main study areas in play deprivation and states the following:
  - If normal play experiences are absent throughout a child’s life, that child is more likely to become highly violent and anti-social regardless of demography.
  - If children are kept in and not allowed out to play, they experience play deprivation and are likely to manifest symptoms ranging from aggression and repressed emotions and social skills to an increased risk of obesity.
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  - The ages of 0–7 are seen developmentally as the “sensitive period” for neurological growth and play deprivation during this period is considered likely to be particularly damaging.
  - Studies have reported that play is essential for brain development, implying that play deprivation will adversely affect brain growth. A US study reported devastating effects of play deprivation on Romanian orphans, linking them to reduction in the brain size of the affected children (Tobin 1997).
When other species are deprived of play they show highly aggressive and bizarre behaviour and appear to completely lose touch with the social norms and accepted behavioural protocols of that species.

- “Rearing rats without the opportunity to play results in disturbed social, agonistic and sexual behaviour, suggesting that social play is essential for the development of normal social behaviour in the rat. The 18th day in the life of the rat has been identified as the sensitive period” (Van den Berg et al 1999). This study would seem to support the contentions made about the impacts of play in relation to developmentally sensitive periods.

- Some Romanian paediatric hospitals have provided striking evidence of the benefits of play, for neglected, abused, and play-deprived children. The conditions in which these children were kept during the 1990s were reminiscent of the controlled experiments of Harlow and Suomi in the 1950s and 1960s. They had studied monkeys deprived of contact with their actual mothers or surrogate wire-cage mothers, and of play with nearby monkeys in separate cages and found that: “having no playmates to provide motor stimulation, wire cage reared infants develop compulsive and stereotypic rocking behaviours strikingly reminiscent of the human autistic child.”

Such visual behavioural parallels led to the White Rose Initiative being founded: a charity which sends playworkers from Leeds Metropolitan University to work with children in a Romanian paediatric hospital. “The children, ranging in age from one to ten years old, had suffered chronic neglect and abuse. They had previously spent most of their lives tied in the same cot in the same hospital ward. They were poorly fed and their nappies were rarely changed. Although able to see and hear other children, they experienced little in the way of social interaction” (Brown 2003).

“During a period when nothing changed in their lives, other than their introduction to the play work project, the children themselves changed dramatically. Their social interaction became more complex; physical activities showed a distinct move from gross to fine motor skill; the children’s understanding of the world around them was improved and they began to play in highly creative ways. They no longer sat rocking, staring vacantly into space. Instead they had become fully engaged active human beings...” (Brown and Webb 2005).

Recent Sources for Play Deprivation

Gaps/Future Research Projects
- There is a need for more detailed research into the specific nature and forms of play deprivation and the impact of programmes intended to address this.

- There is a need to monitor the increasingly popular awareness of the effects of the erosion and disappearance of play upon a range of children in a diversity of contexts.
8. Conclusion

Building the Evidence Base: Topical concerns

This project has identified evidence-based research (2001-2006) that demonstrates some of the benefits of play and playwork, and the effects of its diminishment or absence from the lives of children and young people.


Traditionally, low priority and status has been given to research into play and playwork, perhaps unsurprisingly, the evidence-based research review reveals gaps in knowledge and the need for new research methodologies. This study indicates the need for further investigation in the following areas.

• Long-term research building on the large body of research about the benefits of play to learning in early years that looks at the continued impact of play on learning and education through 5 – 15 year olds. There is a gap in research that clearly separates the early years from older children.
• The benefits of play to the learning of children with special educational needs.
• The benefits and methods of adult-directed play on learning.
• The role of playtime supervisors and playworkers in increasing the physical activity levels of children through play.
• The long-term impacts on mental health of reduced opportunities to play on children and young people.
• Research that specifically identifies the costs/benefits of staffed play opportunities as opposed to childcare in general, which forms the bulk of the evidence in England.
• The impact of play on children in the long term and its contribution to well-rounded individuals who are economically active and successful as adults.
• Research to assess the impact of the large voluntary workforce and their likelihood to move into paid employment in the playwork sector.
• The positive impact of quality green spaces in children in economically disadvantaged areas has been researched but there is little about the impact of staffed play provision, mobile play facilities or play rangers in economically disadvantaged areas.
• How play contributes to workforce development by improving the skills and qualifications of the workforce, both for employment in the playwork sector and childcare sector as well as in other industries.
• Retrospective studies into the links between play experiences and career destinations.
• The importance of friendships in children’s play.
• Further research into the link between play, playwork and the community.
• The role of playwork in agendas relating to social justice.
• Play in diversity including the role of playwork in relation to age, gender, ethnicity and disability.
• Studies of play and development in a range of different contexts.
• Research into the relevance of play to lifespan development.
• The nature of the relationship between community cohesion and the delivery of play services.
• The impacts of the introduction (or withdrawal) of play services on crime in the community.
• Studies of play and development in relation to the middle childhood and teenage years.
• The nature of play as a developmental process.
• The role of playwork in facilitating development.
The role of play services in reducing the isolation of disabled children.

Evaluation of impacts of new play services upon relationships within communities.

There is a need for more detailed research into the specific nature and forms of play deprivation and the impact of programmes intended to address this.

There is a need to monitor the increasing awareness of the effects of the erosion and disappearance of play upon a range of children in a diversity of contexts.

These areas, together with those derived from past and present studies, new child-centred and playwork agendas and issues deriving from public policy and social change, should instruct further research into the benefits of play and the impacts of play deprivation.

As suggested at the outset, whilst beyond the bounds of an evidence-based approach it is felt that research within the social constructionist and applied traditions, focusing upon potentialities for attitudinal and practice-based change would further enhance understandings of the benefits of play and playwork. It is hoped that this study provides a useful contribution to this research agenda and to an approach that seeks to expand play opportunities for children and young people, and improved status and conditions for those providing them.
Appendix One: Methodology

1. Aim
To compile the best, recent, evidence-based research that demonstrates the impact and benefits of play and playwork and best describes the consequences of not making play facilities available to young people.

2. Objectives
- To identify evidence-based research through a literature review (post 2001).
- To build on existing reviews of the evidence (pre 2001).
- To identify gaps in research for future projects.

3. Process
The specific aim of the literature search was to identify published and unpublished qualitative and quantitative research studies that have examined the benefits of playwork, or conversely the effects of play deprivation. This included published academic literature and published or unpublished reports from government departments and agencies, children's charities and trusts.

It was decided that the main area of interest was play in supervised settings including both open access and registered provision. The project team agreed on the headings below as a basis for the literature search and under which to organise research illustrating the benefits of play.

- Social
- Economic
- Developmental and behavioural
- Health and well-being
- Education and learning
- Play deprivation

As a starting point the literature search concentrated on research-based evidence published in 2001 or later, this was because two significant reviews had already been undertaken in 2001: ‘Making the Case for Play: Gathering the evidence’, Issy Cole-Hamilton, Andrew Harrop and Cathy Street (2001) and ‘Realising the Potential: The case for cultural services – Play’, report prepared for the Local Government Association (2001).

Research was identified through the following process:
1. Introducing the project through a presentation to SkillsActive regional officers for playwork education and training and asking for feedback on data sources or contacts they were aware of.

2. Publicising the project widely and with requests for relevant information through the Children's Play Council email network, UK Playworkers email network, Play Research Network, SkillsActive network of trainers and FE colleges, the SkillsActive website and articles in Play Today, Nursery World and Play Words.

3. A search of the database held and updated by the Children's Play Information Service.

4. Contacting key researchers/leads in:
- Government departments and agencies e.g. the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and Sure Start;
- University departments where research into children and young people and play is undertaken e.g. the Thomas Coram Research Unit at the University of London;
- Relevant trusts and charities e.g. the National Children's Bureau, Children's Play Council, 4Children and the Daycare Trust;
- University departments where research has been undertaken by students on playwork HE courses.

5. Web searches of key agencies
As the literature review process progressed it became clear that research under some of the headings identified was limited and variable in type and quality. In some instances the findings have been based on case study research and readers are referred to the information on each research source detailed in the appendices to verify the details of the research and the research methodology.

6. Report structure
Key information about each piece of research identified in the literature review was collated in individual tables in Appendix Two. This included: citation, methodology, aims and objectives, research design, key findings and conclusions. It also identifies the policy area or key theme/s that each piece of research can be categorised under. Within the main report key findings under each of the headings have been bullet pointed for accessibility and evidence was looked for of the benefits of play and playwork to children, families and the wider community.

The list of sources under each of the chosen headings is cross referenced by page number to the relevant research summary in Appendix Two.
Appendix Two: Research Summaries

Research Summaries:


17. Rogers, S. (2005) Role Play in Reception Classes, Economic and Social Research Council


### DEVELOPMENTAL AND BEHAVIOURAL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study name</th>
<th>Children Visiting Prison. Can it be made easier? The Friend Independent Quaker Journal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author/s</td>
<td>Christine Andrews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>May 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study focus</td>
<td>Play provision in prisons for visiting children of all ages 2 - 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of participants</td>
<td>Children of prisoners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research design</td>
<td>Qualitative; small descriptive case study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main findings</td>
<td>Play and the role of the playworker help to “normalise” the experience of visiting prison, and make it easier for mums and their children. Play provision eases the emotional tensions surrounding visits and allows children their legitimate space – without disturbing other prisoners and visitors. Playwork in prisons has a “problem-solving benefit” (makes visits easier for everyone) and is a source of social justice, children are not punished by the visit experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>Small-scale research that indicates the therapeutic benefits of play</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### ECONOMIC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study name</th>
<th>New Deal for Communities: The National Evaluation Delivering Play Spaces in NDC Areas: Research report 38</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author/s</td>
<td>Nicola Barraclough, Jude Bennington, Stephen Green – Sheffield Hallam University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>August 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study focus</td>
<td>This report is an evaluation of the process of delivering improvements to play spaces in several New Deal for Communities areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of participants</td>
<td>Norwich NDC and Bradford Trident NDC.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Research design | Data collection methods included:  
- A literature review;  
- Telephone interviews with eight NDC Partnerships;  
- Two in-depth case studies in Bradford and Norwich NDCs;  
- Secondary analysis of the NDC Household Survey 2002 conducted by MORI. |
| Main findings |  
- Poor quality and/or lack of parks and open space were considered a problem by 47% of NDC residents.  
- The value of play to NDC areas was recognised.  
- Success of the play projects was based on community consultation and effective partnership working. |
| Conclusions | This research is evaluative and mainly focuses on the process of delivering play spaces in NDC areas but includes some limited insights into the benefits of play and the value of play in economically disadvantaged areas. |
### SOCIAL, ECONOMIC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study name</th>
<th>Assessment of the Benefits and Costs of Out of School Care</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author/s</td>
<td>Blake Stevenson Ltd for The Scottish Executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>February 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study focus</td>
<td>The economic and social benefits of out-of-school care (OSC)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Characteristics of participants**

“The settings for OSC are most commonly provided after or before school and during school holidays. After-school clubs, holiday playschemes, breakfast clubs, kids’ clubs, playcentres, playschemes, playclubs and playcamps are all included under the umbrella of out-of-school care. In all these cases, Smith and Baker (2000a) stress that provision is registered care where attendance is pre-booked. Out-of school-care is provided by playworkers who supervise children and organise activities”.

**Research design**

This study was based on secondary research and included:

- The development of a benefits and costs assessment framework;
- A literature review of relevant UK and international literature;
- An assessment of the costs associated with the provision of out-of-school-care;
- A cost/benefits framework analysis.

**Main findings**

The economic benefits of out-of-school-care include:

- Parents: access to employment, education and training and associated benefits;
- Children: increase in household income;
- Communities: tackling poverty and disadvantage through the creation of employment and other opportunities;
- Employers: stability of labour force.

The social benefits of out-of-school-care include:

- Parents: parenting skills and respite care;
- Children: opportunities for learning and social development;
- Communities: greater social inclusion, reduction in youth crime and development of citizenship;
- Employers: parent workers given peace of mind about childcare;
- Schools and service providers: integration into the community and development of learning environment.

**Conclusions**

Small-scale research that indicates the therapeutic benefits of play.Rigorous research with clear recommendations for future research including longitudinal studies. They make the recommendation that there is a need for more rigorous comparative research.
### PLAY DEPRIVATION, DEVELOPMENTAL AND BEHAVIOURAL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study name</th>
<th>Playwork Theory and Practice</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Author/s</strong></td>
<td>Fraser Brown, (ed) Playwork Theory and Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chapter 4 – Compound Flexibility: the role of play work in child development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chapter 5 - Bob Hughes, Play Deprivation Play Bias and Playwork Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chapter 11 - (with Sophie Webb) - Playwork in Adversity: working with abandoned children in Romania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date</strong></td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Study focus</strong></td>
<td>The book contains 12 chapters relating to playwork theory and practice with a range of study foci and methodologies. The studies cited above draw upon vignettes from practice – providing qualitative, reflective, observational accounts linked to theory. The Romania study involves work with children in a Romanian paediatric hospital.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characteristics of participants</strong></td>
<td>In the Romanian study – 16 children aged from 2 to 10 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research design</strong></td>
<td>Action based – a remedial play-based programme provided by the White Rose Initiative, qualitative study involving observations, video filming and reflective journals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main findings</strong></td>
<td>The interventions of the playworkers produced dramatic and very striking developmental benefits for all of the children involved. Hughes – play bias and play deprivation can have detrimental impacts that playwork can address. Brown – play per se is something of a developmental process, as illustrated by the development in playing children of compound flexibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusions</strong></td>
<td>The ‘despatches’ described from practice convincingly demonstrate the efficacy of play and playwork through theorising, case study illustration, action based research and observation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### DEVELOPMENTAL AND BEHAVIOURAL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study name</th>
<th>Children Without Play, Journal of Education no. 35 pp. 139-158</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Author/s</strong></td>
<td>Sophie Webb and Fraser Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date</strong></td>
<td>February 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Study focus</strong></td>
<td>The impact of playwork interventions on the development of children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characteristics of participants</strong></td>
<td>Chronically neglected and abused children aged 1-10 in a Romanian paediatric hospital.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research design</strong></td>
<td>Action-based, small-scale qualitative research based on observations, video and reflective journals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main findings</strong></td>
<td>In terms of a number of specific (11) specially designed playwork indicators; all children were found to make some degree of developmental progress. In spite of a hospitalisation prognosis and descriptions of some of the children as “retarded” all but two were fostered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusions</strong></td>
<td>In so far as “care” can be seen as a constituent feature of playwork, and “relating” crucial to the role of the playworker, it can be asserted that the playwork interventions of the White Rose Initiative had strikingly beneficial developmental impacts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# SOCIAL AND INCLUSION

| Study name                     | PinC Action Research Project  
|                               | Supporting Inclusive Play in Schools Inspiring Inclusive  
|                               | Play The Play Inclusive Pack  
|                               | The Yard  
| Author/s                      | Theresa Casey  
| Date                          | 2002 - 2004  
| Study focus                   | Disabled and non-disabled children and play and inclusion.  
| Characteristics of participants | Primary school-aged children attending “special” “mainstream” school with attached unit for autistic children. Disabled and non-disabled children.  
|                               | Play activities introduced at two schools, and at another school children make regular visits to the Yard Adventure Playground Edinburgh.  
| Research design               | Action-based research considering the introduction of play through playwork in three settings. Data collection through observations, discussions and interviews, with teachers, helpers, children and playworkers.  
| Main findings                 | • Play aids inclusion, and inclusion aids learning and well-being.  
|                               | • Play results in the formation of new friendships providing relatively rare opportunities for disabled children to socialise with non-disabled peers.  
|                               | • Play is important for communication, language development, individual and group identity.  
|                               | • Play experiences can contribute to success in school  
|                               | • Play projects improve relationships between teachers and children and leads to greater interpersonal understanding and stronger adult appreciation of children’s cultures.  
| Conclusions                   | Original and useful action-based research methodologies including an evaluated model for inclusion.  
|                               | Evaluated pack of materials including play activities, games etc. used at the different venues with children and teachers.  
|                               | Play was found to be a very useful tool for inclusion and the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.  
| Signpost                      | Themes of play, disability and inclusion to be found in Playing Together, Barnardo’s Evaluation – also links to friendships, developing social skills and broadening social contacts.  

## HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study name</th>
<th>Passing Time: A report about young people and communities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author/s</td>
<td>Laura Edwards and Becky Hatch, Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>December 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study focus</td>
<td>This report explores how young people talk about their community and the activities and support they want to see provided out of school. The focus was provision outside of mainstream education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of participants</td>
<td>40 young people aged 13 to 19 in an area of Coventry, who committed their views of the local area onto film.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research design</td>
<td>Qualitative research through interviews with young people recorded on film.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main findings</td>
<td>The main themes raised by young people were:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Lack of things to do;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Drink and drugs;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Safety;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Negative perceptions of young people and anti-social behaviour;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Poor state of the local environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>From this the report draws conclusions about policies and issues that need to be tackled.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## PLAY DEPRIVATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study name</th>
<th>Play Deprivation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author/s</td>
<td>Bob Hughes, Play Wales briefing paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study focus</td>
<td>Literature review of evidence-based research suggesting the basis of claims for the effects of play deprivation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of participants</td>
<td>Children in adverse settings e.g. in Romanian orphanages in the 1990s and animal studies, particularly with monkeys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research design</td>
<td>Diverse in terms of studies reviewed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main findings</td>
<td>Children deprived of play - likely to be violent and anti-social.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Possible links to obesity and repressed emotions and reduced social skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reduction of brain activity linked to depression.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>The above are suggested by the evidence-based research referred to in the study – though results of play deprivation are not conclusive and need further research.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Study name</strong></th>
<th>Young Londoners Survey: Report on key findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Author/s</strong></td>
<td>ICM prepared for Greater London Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date</strong></td>
<td>June 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Study focus</strong></td>
<td>Research with children and young people to gain an insight into what they think about living in London and to understand what their priorities would be for improving the capital.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characteristics of participants</strong></td>
<td>1,072 London residents aged 11-16 years in 150 randomly selected locations across Greater London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research design</strong></td>
<td>Quantitative survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main findings</strong></td>
<td>Children and young people’s views of:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Things to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Getting involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Crime and safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Transport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Getting information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Local governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Images of London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Priorities for London.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusions</strong></td>
<td>General survey that gives some insights into children’s views of play in terms of things they do in the capital although this is not the focus of the survey.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study name</th>
<th>Play, Naturally: A review of children's natural play</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author/s</td>
<td>Stuart Lester and Martin Maudsley – Playwork Partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>August 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web link</td>
<td><a href="http://www.playday.org.uk/view.asp?ID=51">http://www.playday.org.uk/view.asp?ID=51</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study focus</td>
<td>A review exploring research associated with the theme of Playday 2006: Play, Naturally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of participants</td>
<td>Literature review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research design</td>
<td>Literature review looking at recent research into children's play in natural space and including some reference to ‘classic’ works that have laid strong foundations for this area of study.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Main findings            | Evidence and information in the review supports the following findings:  
  • Play is a biological drive and is a process whereby children can affiliate with the natural environment.  
  • There are wide-ranging values and benefits arising from children's play in natural settings, including benefits for physical, mental and emotional health and opportunities to explore different play types and play behaviours.  
  • Access to play freely in natural spaces may be limited for children and this can have a negative effect on children’s play behaviours.  
  • The report also makes recommendations for supporting children’s opportunities to play in natural spaces. |
| Conclusions              | A literature review that explores recent research into play and the natural environment in detail and makes recommendations for the future. |

## SOCIAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL BENEFITS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study name</th>
<th>Let's Play Together: Play and Inclusion – Evaluation of Better Play Round Three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author/s</td>
<td>Anna Ludvigsen, Chris Creegan, Helen Mills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>October 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study focus</td>
<td>Eight out of 94 “inclusion” projects in the third round of the Better Play programme. Consideration of understandings of “inclusion” as it relates to disabled children and the nature of play provision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of participants</td>
<td>Children aged 5 – 14 years, playworkers, support workers, volunteers, and parents/carers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research design</td>
<td>Well developed qualitative methodologies for evaluation were used, including with children: spinner and parachute game, chatterbox, story board and helping hands. Diaries, record sheets, interviews and questionnaires were used with adults.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main findings</td>
<td>Play projects valued for friendship opportunities – especially between disabled and non-disabled children. This led to increased awareness and acceptance of different needs between children and parents attending the project. The longer disabled and non-disabled children spent together the more likely they were to interact and play together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>Lots of findings to indicate that Best Play and Better Play objectives were being met – relating to play provision, service delivery and children’s well-being. Insights into the different perceptions of inclusion and some difficulties with regard to providing inclusive play settings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments/Signposts</td>
<td>The evaluation criteria and Best Play and Better Play objectives link to development, health and other topics in this study. There are a lot of findings to indicate the benefits of play.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study name</th>
<th>Reducing Children’s Car Use: The health and potential car dependency impacts (summarised in the article Making Children’s Live More Active, Centre for Transport Studies University College London (2004))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author/s</td>
<td>Professor Roger Mackett: Centre for Transport Studies University College London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study focus</td>
<td>Children’s physical activity and car use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of participants</td>
<td>195 children in Years 6 and 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research design</td>
<td>The children were fitted with portable motion sensors and kept activity and travel diaries for four days: two weekdays plus one weekend. The sensors produced results in terms of activity calories (calories consumed in carrying out activities as opposed to calories consumed in carrying maintaining bodily functions). From these results conclusions were drawn about the impact of children’s activity patterns and travel on the quantities of physical activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main findings</td>
<td>Play is one of the best things that children can do in terms of burning up calories. Play – including unstructured ball games, outdoor play and other unstructured activities – comes just below PE or games lessons in terms of the number of calories burned. Play is also recognised as something that children are likely to spend more time doing than PE. Walking to and from school every day uses more activity calories than two hours of PE and games lessons and was also linked to children who walked using more calories in all other activities than children who travelled by car. Outdoor play uses as many calories as organised activities and is more likely to have the additional benefit of walking to and from that activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>Academic research based on physical activity measures that shows the valuable contribution of play to children’s physical activity in comparison to other activities and related to walking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study name</td>
<td>Such Enthusiasm – a Joy to See: An evaluation of Forest School in England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author/s</td>
<td>Richard Murray and Liz O’Brien for Forest Research and the New Economics Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>October 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study focus</td>
<td>The report presents the findings of a longitudinal evaluation of three case studies in England. It aims to build on a previous study in Wales and explore the benefits and impacts of forest schools on children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of participants</td>
<td>24 children were tracked over eight months.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research design</td>
<td>Self-appraisal evaluation using a three-stage methodology which included hypothesis, evidence and review, through: • Storyboard • On-site data collection and analysis • Reflection poster.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main findings</td>
<td>The report concentrates on the potential for positive outcomes from forest schools and organises the findings under eight themes - many of which were related to play e.g. den building and exploratory play: • Confidence • Social skills • Language and communication • Motivation and concentration • Physical skills • Knowledge and understanding • New perspectives • Ripple effects beyond Forest School.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>This study is not specifically about play but Forest Schools do use free play in the natural environment for learning, and different kinds of play are recognised in the course of the research e.g. exploratory play, imaginative play and den building in this evaluation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## SOCIAL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study name</th>
<th>Reflections on Adventure Play (Parts 1 and 2) – A video tape</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author/s</td>
<td>Maureen Palmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study focus</td>
<td>Ex-users of Cornwallis Adventure Playground, Islington – diverse in terms of gender, ethnicity, sexual preference.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Characteristics of participants | 8 young women (late twenties/early thirties)  
3 young men (similar ages). |
| Research design               | Qualitative/retrospective longitudinal research, including, interviews exploring the impacts the interviewees felt the playground has had upon their lives and will have (and in some cases for their own children – now using the playground). |
| Main findings                 | • The playground experience was highly valued in retrospect (possibly due to selection bias).  
• There was a key impact on the feeling of belonging to a community and to having a place to go outside of home that was theirs.  
• It was a valued opportunity to explore identities and develop new ideas and to challenge and be challenged.  
• Arts and crafts activities were a source of pleasure and relaxation as a child – used in adulthood to calm stress and reduce high blood pressure, by one of the interviewees.  
• Four of the interviewees had gone on to work as playworkers as a direct result of the playground experience.  
• Participants valued risk in play and making mistakes as a way of learning.  
• All participants valued the role and contribution of the playworkers. |
| Conclusions                   | Play on the adventure playground provided a lot of benefits for: identity, development, career choice, emotional safety and citizenship. It is valued today for offspring, though much less risky play. |
EDUCATION

Study name | Role Play in Reception Classes: pupil and teacher perspectives
Author/s | Dr Sue Rogers for the Economic and Social Research Council
Date | 2005
Study focus | An exploratory study of children’s imaginative role play in three reception classes.
Characteristics of participants | 144 four and five-year-olds in three areas of South West England.
Research design | Qualitative research over a school year. Methods of data collection included:
• Semi-structured interviews
• Participant and non-participant observation
• Video
• Participant observation in small group work
• Photographs
• Informal conversations with children
• Children’s drawings
• Role play scenarios
• Story-based activity.
Main findings | • Children in reception classes need time and space for uninterrupted play and adopted creative strategies to deal with adult (classroom) agendas.
• Children’s role play is ‘contained’ by organisational, physical and social factors in the classroom.
• Access to outdoor as well as indoor play spaces appear to benefit children in reception classes.
• Role play themes were dependent on gender.
• Time, space and choice are significant factors in the complexity of children’s role play.
From the research findings the report also suggests factors that warrant consideration when providing role play in reception classes.
Conclusions | Academic-based exploratory research which looks at the specific benefits of role play to younger children in a school setting.

DEVELOPMENTAL AND BEHAVIOURAL

Study name | Reframing Playwork Reframing Challenging Behaviour: Summary report of a research project to evaluate playwork with children with challenging behaviour
Author/s | Wendy Russell
Date | Nottingham City Council – March 2005 – March 2006 (This review is based upon a summary of the research). Full findings will be available September 2006
Study focus | Seven children aged 10 – 12 years and eight playworkers on two play projects in Nottingham – an open-access play centre and “play-in-the-parks project”
Characteristics of participants | Children living in the community identified as Tier 2 children with significant levels of social economic physical or psychological disadvantage. Aged 10 – 2 years. Children identified as exhibiting challenging behaviour.
Research design | Training and induction of staff to “new thinking in playwork”, the development of play profiles, reflections on practice and discussion meetings.
Main findings | Playwork as a distinctively designed approach focusing upon an understanding of children’s play and play and other behaviours, is felt to be beneficial to playworkers and supports a re-conception of children’s behaviour that is experienced as less challenging to all participants.
Conclusions | Playwork is a distinctive technique that can be used explicitly to work with children and young people both with and without challenging behaviour with effects that are deemed to be socially beneficial to playworkers and children.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>HEALTH AND WELL-BEING</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Study name</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Author/s</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Date</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Study focus</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characteristics of participants</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Research design</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Main findings</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Signposts</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### DEVELOPMENT, HEALTH AND WELL-BEING, ECONOMIC, EDUCATION AND LEARNING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study name</th>
<th>A Child’s Place: Why environment matters to children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author/s</td>
<td>A Green Alliance / Demos report by Gillian Thomas and Guy Thompson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>May 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web link</td>
<td><a href="http://www.green-alliance.org.uk/publications/PubAChildsPlace_page195.aspx">http://www.green-alliance.org.uk/publications/PubAChildsPlace_page195.aspx</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study focus</td>
<td>Children’s attitudes towards their environment and how it affects them: “The aim was to establish, via the children’s perspective, what the lessons are for policy-makers”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of participants</td>
<td>Ten and eleven-year-olds in four locations in England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research design</td>
<td>Qualitative mixed methodological approach including: 20 paired interviews with children, three tours of children’s spaces with children, playground observation, survey of parents and two interviews with head teachers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Main findings | • There is inequality of access to high-quality natural environments between children living in rural and urban areas.  
• Children have a strong sense of the environment as a social space and this influences the way they use public space for outdoor play and personal development.  
• Assessing danger is children’s top priority when thinking about outdoor spaces.  
• Children gain a powerful understanding of the environment through exploration of their own natural environment. |
| Conclusions | The focus of this research was children and the environment but it contains some useful insights into children’s play and the environment linked to their health, education and general well-being. |
| Signposts | The environment for outdoor play links to children’s health and well-being and to the quality of the environment available to children. |

### EDUCATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study name</th>
<th>Making Playful Learning Visible: Phase two research report</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author/s</td>
<td>Siobhan Thomas and James Bradburne, Next Generation Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study focus</td>
<td>The project aims to help parents see the ways in which their children learn through play when left to their own devices. This second phase of the project aimed to develop a methodology to inform and guide parents and caregivers in observing their children’s learning and to create a searchable database of video observations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of participants</td>
<td>66 parents and carers and their children participated at three different settings for early years children. Participants included lower income families and ethnic and linguistic minorities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research design</td>
<td>Data was collected through an “observational methodology” self-report, pre- and post-session questionnaires, group discussions, face-to-face interviews, observations and field notes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Main findings | • This project helped parents to learn how to observe their children and develop a methodology for doing so.  
• The project enhanced parents understanding of their children’s learning.  
• Parents became more tolerant of different types of play and behaviour in their children e.g. being messy or boisterous. |
| Conclusions | A recent study but it focuses on early years. It does show that parents can learn from observing their children’s play and have a role to play in developing and encouraging their children’s play and learning. |
# THE BENEFITS OF PLAY AND PLAYWORK

## PLAY DEPRIVATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study name</th>
<th>Play Deprivation Decreases Adult Social Behaviour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author/s</td>
<td>Van den Berg, C., Van Ree, J. and Spruijt, B. Rudolf Magnus Institute for Neuroscience, Utrecht University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study focus</td>
<td>Rats and play deprivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of participants</td>
<td>Rodents deprived of play and social contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research design</td>
<td>Quantitative and observational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main findings</td>
<td>Rearing rats without the opportunity to play results in disturbed social, agnostic and sexual behaviour, suggesting that social play is essential for the development of normal social behaviour in the rat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>A recent study but it focuses on early years. It does show that parents can learn from observing their children’s play and have a role to play in developing and encouraging their children’s play and learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## SOCIAL, DISABILITY, INCLUSION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study name</th>
<th>Findings: Joseph Rowntree Trust Informing Change: Inclusion of disabled children in primary school playgrounds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author/s</td>
<td>Helen Woolby, Marc Armitage, Julia Bishop, Mavis Curtis and Jane Ginsberg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>January 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study focus</td>
<td>Children at play in the playgrounds of six Yorkshire primary schools includes a focus on disabled children and the play and social interactions of all children and adults in the playgrounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of participants</td>
<td>Children aged 5 – 11 years, support workers and teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research design</td>
<td>Qualitative research through observations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Main findings | • That “all” children interact and play together in the playground, and use several “play types”.  
• Practical advice on the need to train support workers in terms of playwork and allowing children to take risks in their play.  
• Need audits of playgrounds to ensure all children have access to play.  
• School playtimes very valuable and need to be kept, where under threat. |
| Conclusions | This research confirms the social benefits of play in terms of interaction and making friends. Play seems to have an important role in facilitating the inclusion of all children in school playground play. |
Strong on the social benefits of play and inclusion. |
### DEVELOPMENT AND BEHAVIOUR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study name</th>
<th>Play: Making play space in the city in Play, Participation and Potential: Putting young people at the heart of communities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author/s</td>
<td>Ken Worpole for Groundwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study focus</td>
<td>The role of children and play on the street, in the community and the built environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of participants</td>
<td>Very general population of children, with play needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research design</td>
<td>Policy report drawing on the work of Groundwork- small-scale action-based evaluations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Main findings | • Children have been forced indoors by the car, and other factors.  
• They need to be included in programme design.  
• A large majority of young people find fixed play provision boring.  
• Germany, Denmark and Netherlands provide good examples of outdoor environments that include children and address their play needs. |
| Conclusions | Social policy and the development of the outdoor environment need to provide for play and include children. |

### DEVELOPMENT AND BEHAVIOUR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study name</th>
<th>No Particular Place to Go? Children, Young People and Public Space</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author/s</td>
<td>Ken Worpole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web link</td>
<td><a href="http://www.groundwork.org.uk">www.groundwork.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study focus</td>
<td>“A report to provide an overview of current government and community initiatives around children’s and young people’s need and use of public space”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of participants</td>
<td>Children and young people, in various UK contexts, including teenagers and children in their middle childhood years.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Research design | A social policy report informed by:  
• Quantitative surveys e.g. Mori polls, accident statistics, health (obesity);  
• Case studies of best practice in park and playground design;  
• Some consultations with children. |
| Main findings | • Children are overlooked and under-considered in social policy formulations.  
• Children felt victimised by adults in terms of attitudes to play and recreation.  
• Improved play provision leads to a reported decline in anti-social behaviour – reduced vandalism and bullying.  
• Children like staffed provision.  
• Youth shelters – and leisure “play” provision for young people needs to be carefully developed with regard to context, local conditions, and the views of all involved. |
| Conclusions | Overseas travel has led to attitudinal change in terms of expectations about the nature of provision for children and has heightened expectations in terms of the nature and quality of that provision. |
**EDUCATION AND LEARNING, HEALTH AND WELL-BEING, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND DEVELOPMENT AND BEHAVIOURAL**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study name</th>
<th>The Better Play Programme 2000-2005: An evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author/s</td>
<td>Philippa Youlden and Sarah Harrison, Youlden Harrison Associates for Children’s Play Council and Barnardos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>February 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study focus</td>
<td>The results of an evaluation of the Better Play programme – a four-year £10.8 million grant programme funding children’s services across England. This evaluation focuses on six projects funded in the first year of Better Play.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of participants</td>
<td>Children, staff and parents at six play projects.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Research design | Qualitative evaluative methodology, including the following data collection techniques:  
  - Face-to-face interviews  
  - Observation activity books  
  - Worker diaries  
  - Graffiti/talking walls  
  - Questionnaires  
  - Telephone interviews  
  - Self-esteem measures. |
| Main findings | The projects were evaluated against the Better Play programme objectives and the service and outcome objectives in Best Play: What play provision should do for children (NPFA 2000) (see Key supporting texts below).  
The evaluation found that all of the objectives referred to above were met, although limitations in research methods and data collected limit claims of cause and effect in the long term.  
Key findings include:  
  - Children gained satisfaction from making choices, which were enhanced by the skills of playworkers;  
  - Children challenged and tested their own boundaries building self-esteem and contributing to learning;  
  - External partnerships extended the range of play opportunities for children and enhanced social interaction;  
  - All projects were found to foster self-esteem and independence;  
  - Physical play was found to contribute to children’s health and well-being. |
| Conclusions | Evaluation focusing on the benefits of play and playwork. |
Key supporting texts:


SEMINAL REPORT FOUNDATIONS FOR THIS REPORT BENEFITS OF PLAY AND PLAYWORK WHICH SEEKS TO CONTRIBUTE TO THESE FINDINGS THROUGH THE DOCUMENTATION OF EVIDENCE- BASED RESEARCH 2002 – 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study name</th>
<th>Realising the Potential: the case for cultural services – Play, Local Government Association</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author/s</td>
<td>Coalter, F. and Taylor J.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study focus</td>
<td>Literature and research review relating to the benefits of play and play provision and the role of playwork within this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of participants</td>
<td>N/A. Literature review of work of academics, projects and to some extent practitioners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research design</td>
<td>Evaluative reviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main findings</td>
<td>Consideration of play, rationale for play provision, nature of playwork; play deprivation studies, social and educational value of play and playwork. Benefits of play to physical and mental health the importance of hospital play and play therapy to SPICE development and to the community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Conclusions | • Agreements abound around the social and individual benefits of play although there is disagreement about the exact nature of the benefits.  
• Play has immediate and long-term benefits (this needs longitudinal research).  
• Need for more research, cognisant of some of the specific conceptual and methodological issues relating to the nature of play and studying children in relation to existing methodological conventions.  
• Need to disseminate existing findings (the research is not widely known even in the playwork profession).  
• Play may contribute to the educational development of children in formal and informal settings.  
• Play is widely regarded as providing opportunities for language development although social interaction may be more important than play per se.  
• Play may contribute to the enlargement of brain capacity in young children.  
• Many theorists claim that the opportunity to play can improve the ability to use tools, find solutions to problems and increase creativity.  
• Evidence about the positive impact of play in the formal educational process is inconclusive.  
• Play has the potential to contribute to certain strategic social benefits such as tackling the social exclusion of children.  
• Play can help counter the negative effects of poverty and deprivation.  
• Play opportunities are regarded as particularly important for integrating children with disabilities.  
• Adult directive approaches in pursuit of measurable outcomes may reduce the positive benefits of play.  
Recommendations for future research include:  
• Identifying and developing an evidence base for the long- and short-term outcomes of play;  
• More resources for research;  
• The need for longitudinal studies on the impacts and benefits of play;  
• The need for interdisciplinary inter–agency cooperation in the research domain. |
**Study name**  
Making the Case for Play

**Author/s**  
Cole-Hamilton, I., Harrop, A., Street, C.  
Children’s Play Council: National Children’s Bureau

**Date**  
2002

**Study focus**
- Children and parents’ views on play and out-of-school provision. (Section 1)
- The Value of Children’s Play and Play Provision – a systematic research review.
- The planning and location of play provision in England – mapping exercise.
- The state of play.
- Survey of play professionals in England.

**Characteristics of participants**
- Section 1: 13,000 children in over 100 consultations re play provision.
- Other sections: literature and services review.

**Research design**
Varied according to the structure of consultations with children – written questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, children’s conference, consultations led by young people trained as researchers, oral description, observation and photography, poetry and writing.

**Main findings**
Children frequently said they enjoyed physically active indoor and outdoor play; meeting friends, quiet activities and having choices. Parents wanted children to have access to after-school and holiday play provision (financially) and for staffed provision with funny friendly cheerful, listening staff who can deal with conflicts between children.

The Value of Children’s Play and Play Provision – a very thorough literature review – benefits to both the individual child and society can be found in multi-disciplinary contexts e.g. psychology, folklore, human geography, and anthropology.

Professionals in universities, charities and play projects (applied contexts) believe in the importance of play and highlight its erosion through stranger/traffic danger and other social forces.

**Conclusions**
- Need to build up the knowledge base for the benefits of play, playwork and play provision based on the established consensus of those working in the play field.
- Evaluate play projects.
- Undertake further research.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEVELOPMENTAL, PLAY DEPRIVATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Study name</strong></td>
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</table>
| **Author/s**                | National Playing Fields Association (NPFA)  
|                            | The Children's Play Council  
|                            | PLAYLINK |
| **Date**                    | March 2000 reprint September 2000 |
| **Web link**                | http://www.ncb.org.uk/Page.asp?originx1196kk_1784228062593k67z7524348049 |
| **Study focus**             | To provide a tool to evaluate the quality of play provision. – In this sense the publication is not evidence-based research, however, it does provide the criteria used by Better Play for the evaluation of their NOF-funded projects. |
| **Characteristics of participants** | Not applicable |
| **Research design**         | Advisory panel of “play experts”, readers, consultation with practitioners, trialling of the seven objectives at an after-school club, adventure playground, after-school and breakfast clubs, care schemes and play schemes. |
| **Main findings**           | Seven objectives of quality play provision to:  
|                            | i. Extend the choice and control that children have over their play, the freedom they enjoy and the satisfaction they gain from it.  
|                            | ii. Recognise the child’s need to test boundaries and responds positively to that need.  
|                            | iii. Manage the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children safe from harm.  
|                            | iv. Maximise the range of play opportunities.  
|                            | v. Foster independence and self-esteem.  
|                            | vi. Foster children’s respect for others and offer opportunities for social interaction.  
|                            | vii. Foster the child's well-being, healthy growth and development, knowledge and understanding, creativity and capacity to learn. |
| **Conclusions**             | Identification of a research agenda for longer-term studies of the benefits of play.  
|                            | The need for outcome measures and outcome methodologies. |
| **Signposts/Comments**      | • Links to developmental benefits of play and to the effects of play deprivation.  
|                            | • Has influenced the development of quality assurance schemes for play projects (e.g. Quality in Play). |