

The Importance of Play

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September 2019

What do we mean by the word “Play”?

Play seems to have differing meanings dependant upon your own pedagogy.

- Early Years practitioners use the term Learning through Play to plan outcomes for children (guided play)
- Playworkers think about Play as the reason for their role (intrinsically motivated or free play)
- Therapists often refer to “Play Therapy” as a communication tool for children to understand their world and to help them deal with emotional distress and trauma.
- Parents of my generation used the word Play, to get the children out of the house

Descriptions and Definitions

- Play is freely chosen, personally directed, intrinsically motivated behaviour that actively engages the child
- “Play can be fun or serious”
- Through play children explore social, material and imaginary worlds and their relationship with them, expanding their ideas with a flexible range of responses to the challenges they encounter
- By playing, children learn and develop as individuals, and as members of the community”

The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)



The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by the UK Government in December 1991, recognises the importance of play for the child.

Article 31 of the Convention says that:

"States that parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

General Comment 17:



Research Article: “Accessing the Inaccessible: Redefining Play as a Spectrum”

Play is often defined as activity done for its own sake, characterised by:

- means rather than ends (the process is more important than any end point or goal)
- flexibility (objects are put in new combinations or roles are acted out in new ways)
- positive affect (children often smile, laugh, and say they enjoy it)

These criteria contrast play with:

- exploration (focused investigation as a child gets more familiar with a new toy or environment, that may then lead into play)
- work (which has a definite goal), and games (more organized activities in which there is some goal, typically winning the game)

(Smith and Pellegrini, 2013)

The Benefits of Play

Benefits that are experienced at the time that the child is playing

- Provides children with opportunities to enjoy freedom, and exercise choice and control over their actions
- Offers children opportunities for testing boundaries and exploring risk
- Offers a very wide range of physical, social and intellectual experiences for children

Benefits that develop over time

- Fosters children's independence and self-esteem
- Develops children's respect for others and offers opportunities for social interaction
- Supports the child's well-being, healthy growth and development
- Increases children's knowledge and understanding
- Promotes children's creativity and capacity to learn

“We must give childhood back to children. Children must be allowed to follow their inborn drives to play and explore so that they can grow into intellectually, socially, emotionally, and physically strong and resilient adults.” — **Dr. Peter Gray**

“The more risks you allow your child to take, the better they learn to take care of themselves.” — **Roald Dahl**

“We should be simply providing fields of free action for them to become, through playing, the resilient, adaptive, creative, emotionally intelligent, and socially confident young people that we all, in truth, want them to be.” — **Adrian Voce**

“The longer children can enjoy play without the kind of monitoring that leads to self-criticism and self-doubt, the better.” — **Dr. Craigan Usher**

“You don’t remember the times your dad held your handle bars. You remember the day he let go.” — **Lenore Skenazy**

Psychologist Edward Fisher concluded from 46 published studies that pretend play “results in improved performances in both cognitive-linguistic and social affective domains

Children who do not get sufficient play opportunities may experience



- poorer ability in motor tasks
- lower levels of physical activity
- poorer ability to deal with stressful or traumatic situations and events
- poorer ability to assess and manage risk
- poorer social skills, leading to difficulties in negotiating social situations such as dealing with conflict and cultural difference

Ceaușescu's children



In Romania in 1966 contraception was banned for all women and as a result of this, thousands of children were abandoned at State orphanages.

These children were afforded the minimum of care, nappies were changed once a day, the children were fed the most basic of food and were tied into their cots and beds. These children were observed rocking and staring at nothing. These Roma children, many of whom went into the orphanages without disability, became disabled.

Fraser Brown (Professor in Playwork and Lecturer at Leeds Metropolitan University) undertook research along with one of his degree students. As a result of a 6 month intervention where children were played with and provided with verbal stimulation the children were no longer sitting rocking, staring vacantly into space; they were playing together with lots of noise and laughter. Several children had learned to walk properly, and they were beginning to engage with their environment in creative and imaginative ways.

This is a visible and upsetting outcome of play deprivation.

Playful experiences that children in Jersey can access and barriers

Play opportunities

- Parks and playgrounds
- The woods
- Beaches
- Playing out with friends
- School fields (barrier to access)
- Holiday and afterschool play settings
- Playing at home (alone or with siblings/friends)

Barriers

- Parents concerns re Traffic
- Parents concerns re paedophiles
- Children's worries about bullies
- Children's access to green spaces
- Housing organisations lack of understanding
- Peer pressure for parents who want to allow their children out

Obesity levels in Jersey

- According to data released in 2018 a total of 2,034 children – 94 per cent of eligible children – across Reception and Year 6 had their BMIs calculated.
- According to the report, one in five Reception-age children and about one in three Year 6 pupils were overweight or obese.
- There was a disparity between children living in rural parishes and urban areas, with 35 per cent of Year 6 pupils living in the latter described as being overweight or obese. This compares to 25 per cent in rural areas.
- Children attending non-fee-paying schools are also less likely to be a healthy weight, with 22% of four-to-five-year-olds and 35% of ten-to-11-year-olds classed as overweight or obese.
- In comparison, 15% of Reception-class-aged children and 24% of Year 6 pupils at fee-paying schools fall into this category.

Support for playful experiences

- Youth clubs open for longer in the holidays
- Play Rangers in public spaces
- A change in the view of Housing Associations towards play
- Organised sports in public places
- Honorary services having an understanding of children and young peoples needs
- Park's and gardens staff having an understanding of children and young peoples needs
- Free and safe public transport in the holidays for children
- “Playing Out” strategy explored and agreed with housing organisations

Playing Out



Do we want children to be able to play freely outside their own front door?

- **Playing Out** is a parent and resident led movement restoring children's freedom to play out in the streets and spaces where they live, for their health, happiness and sense of belonging. <https://playingout.net>
- Playing Out is also working with British Cycling, supported by Olympic gold medalist Jason Kenny and the Children's Commissioner for England.
- The campaign aims to encourage many more parents and neighbours to take up the 'playing out' model in order to reclaim their streets and estates and give children the chance to cycle and play out freely

Play rangers

In 2003 in the UK there were plenty of parks and open spaces, but no one playing in them. Children had said in various surveys around the UK that they really wanted to be out playing in the parks, however, most of them weren't getting out to play.

The main reason for this was fear.

Children were frightened of older children, and adults were frightened of the children that were out.

Something was needed to break this cycle – to form a bridge between the present state of underuse and a future where parks are active, social and playful places.

Play Ranging was born.....

Play Rangers

Children's outdoor play has many facets that include using playgrounds, playing informal sports, games and activities, interacting with outdoor environments and using natural elements.

A **qualified play worker** who works with children through open access provision in outdoor public spaces is known as a **play ranger**.

Play rangers are trained and police checked and work with children during their leisure time - that is after school and in the holidays. They work all year round and often in all weathers.

Play rangers are 'detached' playworkers, working away from a fixed setting. They also differ from registered after school clubs or play schemes as the children are free to come and go as they choose.

Generally there are no direct charges for play rangers services and no registration is required.

Isle of Play <https://isleofplay.im>



- The Isle of Mann experience

Thoughts

- Jersey is providing limited play opportunities and should do more
- Children are not as active as their contemporaries
- That hand held digital devices are not representative of playful activities
- Progression in play is not understood or represented in policy frameworks, especially beyond the age of five
- That the differences between adult-led and child initiated play remain evident; with policy emphases on educational outputs i.e. teaching through play
- Children's multi-modal communicative practices in play reveal the complexity of thinking, understanding and relationships. This is not actively built upon or perhaps understood

Could Jersey.....



- Plan for Leadership – create a minister for children with responsibility for play
- Legislation – make planning for play a statutory duty
- Investment – more and better play opportunities, spaces and services for children including play in parks and public spaces, playgrounds, housing, play streets, after school and holiday play schemes, adventure playgrounds and schools
- Delivering for play – investment in quality support and training for professionals

'What does the Best Start partnership think Jersey's position on play should be?'

Best Start Partnership's position on Play

Overarching statement

Article 31 UNCRC: All children and young people have the right to play and the right to learn as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Our Pledge: Play is our shared responsibility to support, and enable, all of Jersey's children and young people to access our diverse greenspaces and natural landscapes and to empower them to enjoy these spaces for the purpose of playing and learning.

The Justification: Play brings people together, connecting children and young people with their local areas and communities and helping to develop a sense of place and feeling of belonging and inclusion. It provides a wealth of opportunities for intergenerational activity, enhancing cohesion, reducing social isolation, and helping to build inclusive, resilient communities.

The Benefit: And play is fun! And through that fun, it promotes the development of essential skills, helping children and young people to develop compassion and empathy and to build lasting and loving relationships.

Play promotes language and communication as well as mental, social and emotional wellbeing by helping to reduce stress, increase self-esteem and confidence, develop emotional resilience and build children and young people's confidence in their own capabilities and ability to manage risks and deal with uncertainty.

Play improves the physical health of children and young people by increasing physical activity and equipping them with the skills and attributes essential for living a healthy and active life, thereby contributing to reducing health inequalities and supporting the aims of health policies.

Widening access to the high quality, diverse green spaces and natural landscapes that exist throughout all our communities would ensure that all children, young people and families have easy, local access to excellent outdoor play which is vital for children.

Generating and sharing knowledge and evidence based-research to promote better understanding of the benefits of playing and learning outdoors is key to children's futures.