A situated ethos of playwork

Turning the playwork story into a narrative for change

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Abstract

Playwork is a distinct approach to working with children, and a particular set of perspectives on the nature of children's play in a broader context. We concur with others (e.g. Brown, 2017) that its theory and practice – on play and development, constructs of childhood, the role of adults with children, the allocation and use of space, and children's rights – are unique among the children's professions.

This paper attempts to describe some of these perspectives, the practice tenets that arise from them, and the distinct ethos we suggest they comprise. We then propose a broad rationale for playwork advocacy, congruent with this ethos and its political dimension.

We also attempt to set out a long-term vision for the place of playwork practice within a renewed, reimagined public realm; and we suggest some specific shorter-term, more tangible objectives, towards the aim of formulating a sustained government policy framework that recognises and supports playwork without compromising it: achievable milestones on a roadmap to the longer-term vision.

Through a critical appraisal of the field's recent history, the paper considers how organisational structures for playwork advocacy and professional development have, until now, with the odd exception, been ultimately run not by practitioners but by various branches of government, its agents, employer bodies or established children's charities – generally more aligned with the current hegemony than with anything approximating to the playwork ethos. We argue that, in the absence of a cohesive and authoritative playwork representative body, this has led to near fatal compromises in the development and dissemination of the playwork approach.

The paper addresses the perennial conundrum of a community of practice that profoundly challenges the status quo; yet which, nevertheless, needs to find sufficient leverage in the mainstream policy discourse to secure the resources it needs to sustain its work. As the professional playwork fraternity attempts to regroup after eight years of austerity and UK government policy reversals, we suggest there is an urgent need for

the field to coalesce around a binding narrative – accommodating the plurality of perspectives and approaches that have evolved – to explicitly articulate its ethos in a way that can both speak to a wide public audience and impact on the policymaking process.

The paper concludes that the framework for this narrative should be children's rights, refracted through the prism of the playwork ethos, which is a bulwark against instrumentalist agendas. We suggest that the playwork field, though greatly incapacitated by the dismantling of its infrastructure and the closure of many of its services and courses, has a legitimate claim to be the practice community best qualified to interpret General Comment 17 of the UNCRC (CRC, 2013) for the UK context. We propose that fully engaging with the rights discourse is the logical strategy for playwork advocates; aligning our ethos to an authoritative, coherent policy case that also resonates with a wider political narrative of social and spatial justice, universal human rights and full citizenship for all.

Authors' notes

1. Throughout the text, the first person plural ('we, our, us') is used: sometimes to signify the authors, more often to signify the playwork community of which we are a part. We hope it is clear which is which. With regard to the latter, although neither of us has practised face-to-face playwork for some time we each have many years' experience in the role and have, in our different ways, continued to advocate for play from a playwork perspective. Where we use the first person plural to describe collective positions and assertions by the field, these are, of course, only our interpretation, from our perspective. This is our contribution to a discourse: it is not definitive and we do not claim to speak for anyone other than ourselves.

2. Each of us has, in quite different ways, been a protagonist in the playwork story of recent decades and so cannot claim an objective, academic perspective on the material we cover. Whether the personal experience we bring to the task lends the paper some authenticity, or merely injects it with bias, is for the reader to judge. Certainly, wherever we are critical of the field's decisions at various points in the story, we do not absolve ourselves of blame for our part in them.

3. Playwork, as such, is a UK phenomenon, (with its earliest origins in the junk playgrounds of Denmark) although it can now to be found in other countries too. This paper is about the UK playwork movement, but insofar as it is about government policy for play and playwork, it is especially focused on the English context, which has been, arguably, most affected by changes at the level of the UK government than the other three home nations, which each have devolved administrations.

4. We wrote this paper for the playwork community. However, we hope it will be of interest to others; and also that it might stimulate and contribute to a constructive discourse within our field towards a narrative of playwork and its ethos for a much wider audience. We want to be part of conveying the playwork story to a world we believe needs to hear it.

AV & GS

Introduction

'The church is the multitude of the faithful.'

William of Ockham (1287 – 1347)

Playwork is not a church – quite the opposite, some might say. Yet we are a small multitude and we have a kind of faith. What we describe and propose here may require an act of such faith: a collective willingness to re-examine our tenets and explore the possibilities in aligning them with a new and emerging politics. Our faith rests in a deep and abiding conviction that what we do, how we do it, and why, is valuable and important, in the face of some evidence that this is a vanishing minority view.

A dialogue within our field is urgent, as the corrosive twin effects of successive years of austerity, and the absence of play and playwork from any meaningful policy framework, remorselessly dismantle and eat away at the services and spaces within which we work (CRAE, 2015). The debate must be earnest and focused. It must aim to produce a binding narrative of playwork – its epistemology, its practice and its value – that is both persuasive to the uninitiated and yet true to our faith. It must be a narrative that is cogent and authentic, behind which we can all stand.

With that prize firmly in mind, this piece is by no means intended as a definitive statement of what playwork is, how we should describe it or where it should be positioned in the wider arenas of public and political life. Ours is but one perspective, arising from our individual, very different sets of experience in this field, and the dialogue between us. There are other sets of experiences and other perspectives just as valid. We look forward to engaging with them.

1. The playwork ethos

'... like genetic rivers, whose primeval forces come from sources deep within us and, which, in flowing through us, give us the energy and focus to make attempts at satisfying our most fundamental desires for life and understanding, often in the most trying of circumstances'.

Bob Hughes (2001)

What are the characteristics of playwork? What are its ethics? What are its tenets? How can embracing these facets of our work inform our strategy as a field and enable us to tell a persuasive story about its value to children and society? How does such a narrative remain congruent with our ethos, and yet also make a credible argument for a supportive public policy for play? These are the questions we aim to address.

The qualities of playwork

We suggest:

- **Playwork is emergent.** It recognises that play is unpredictable, complex and immediate. The nexus of playwork practice is in being conscious to the play process, co-creating playspaces with children and, on their cues, consciously playing with them.
- **Playwork is ethical.** It is concerned with children's rights, most obviously their right to play (but we hold that children's rights are interdependent and indivisible) and it privileges these in ways that are not common within other practices and services for children or, indeed, within the wider society.
- **Playwork is political.** It is sensible of power, both in adult-child relationships and in the allocation and use of resources. It resists designs on the playing child that would annex play to serve other agendas.
- **Playwork is situated.** It happens within the lives of children, their families, their communities and their struggles.
- **Playwork is advocatorial.** It recognises that children are engaged in a struggle for their right to play, and advocates for it on their behalf, not only in the mediated playspace, but also within the wider domains of children's lives and the public realm.
- **Playwork is universal.** Because the struggle for their right to play is a factor of childhood, not only specific groups of children, playwork practice and its situation is applicable to all children.

The wider rationale for these descriptions (where they are not self-evident) is hopefully developed in the ensuing text, but we also invite the field to debate, develop, adapt and elaborate them. A robust discourse is strongly encouraged.

A note about the Playwork Principles

It is not the intention of this paper to propose an alternate or revised set of playwork principles (PSG, 2005). However, we should not be averse, as a field, to reviewing our key statements and codes of practice from time-to-time, to ensure their continued currency and validity in evolving contexts. If we lack a recognised process for such a task, that is a matter of concern, and one which needs to be addressed.

Playwork tenets

Playwork practice recognises, both from its reading of the scientific literature and from its own observations and experiences, that there is a fundamental drive to play (Hughes, 2001) and that this drive serves no purpose other than to provoke playing. This is our first and most fundamental tenet.

The practice of playwork is to make space for and attend to the response to this drive, which is playing. We understand this response to be infinite in adaptability and potential forms.

While we recognise that playing is crucial to the wellbeing of children and the survival of our species, this does not obscure our first assumption. Play is simply to delight in and has no other function than its own intrinsic activity. Playing may lead to all manner of incidental or anticipated outcomes and benefits, *but they are not what it is for and they are not what playwork is for.* Playwork believes that misunderstanding this distinction and designing interventions, spaces and curricula based on that misunderstanding is a denial of children's rights and can be profoundly damaging.

The playspace and the ludic ecology

The environment where the drive to play manifests with practitioner involvement is deemed to be the playspace – a mediated area within which the playworker is also a player. Within the playspace there is a kind of ludic dialectic operating and the practitioner is conscious of it. It informs both our practice and our personal development (which are interdependent). Practitioners are conscious players within a ludic ecology, which requires careful maintenance and evaluation for richness of

response. Playwork enriches the environment for playing: physically, geographically, socially and culturally.

Within this rich ludic ecology, practitioners are the subjects of their own development, whereas children – being largely unselfconscious – are the objects of theirs. As children develop through playing, playwork practitioners hold the children's 'being' and 'becoming' to be inseparable, and of equal importance.

Because practitioners' play is conscious and reflective, it generates insights. Our considered responses to these elucidations are at the heart of our practice. Our knowledge commons is a field of insight.

The epistemological basis for our work derives from a number of more established academic disciplines – evolutionary biology, depth psychology, ethnography and anthropology, human and spatial geography, developmental psychology, sociology, hermeneutics*, neuroscience and others – but both adds to these perspectives and interprets them in novel ways, informed by our own research, analysis and evolving practice methods. Playwork is thus a unique field of practice with legitimate claims, in a sympathetic policy context, to professional status.

***Hermeneutics**

We argue that hermeneutics is central to the playwork approach, yet the least understood of its epistemological fields. Hermeneutic inquiry is an interpretation and analysis of meaning, either from the field of research or from adjacent disciplinary fields. A key perspective on playwork practice is that it involves the interpretation of insights and reflections on playing, just as we examine and offer enquiry into the child's played-out material (Sturrock and Else, 1998).

A situated ethos of playwork

Taken together, these tenets could be said to form the basis of playwork practice within the mediated playspace. However, the ludic ecology of the playspace, although in a sense discrete, is also inevitably part of other eco-systems, which include other playspaces, as well as many conceived, planned and lived spaces (potential playspaces) that children, with their drive to play, have to navigate.

Playwork practice therefore rests in two operative areas: the first containing matters within the mediated playspace, the second containing matters beyond the mediated playspace. Both areas are related to playing and are equally important; the interplay of

all these factors is central to our professional practice and its development. Our ethos rests on the iterative reflections arising from all of these criteria.

In other words, our practice is situated in the wider context of the child's life, recognising the significance of context to the child's ludic ecology. Playwork practice must reflect this. Our ethos must be situated within the wider community, taking account of the contexts of the child's circumstances: their family, their community, their neighbourhood and their city. These contexts are each, to a greater or lesser extent, political and socio-economic in nature. Accordingly, our practice also needs tenets for the situated and political nature of our work. We say more about this in part 4, but first we want to elaborate on the policy context for playwork advocacy and its dominant informing discourse, before reviewing, in part 3, how this discourse has indeed been allowed to dominate and, we argue, subvert our progression as a community of practice.

Countering the dominant discourse

A challenge for our field is that the political and economic hegemony is significantly at odds with the playwork approach. From a number of perspectives, playwork quite explicitly rejects the pervading policy paradigm. The different theoretical bases of playwork, and those espousing them, may not always agree, but they each have far more in common with one another than they do with the ethos of schools, childcare, CAMHS and so on, which are variously predicated on future-oriented, instrumentalist perspectives, or on problematising children for different interventions and regimes.

Lester and Russell (2008) identify this 'dominant discourse' as something that obscures the reality that 'children's play has been 'co-opted' (citing Smith, 2005) in modern, industrialised societies, as a way of improving cognitive and social skills'. In terms of child policy, that discourse conceives children as primarily adults-in-the-making and takes adults to mean economically productive units: employees and consumers. This economo-centric view pervades to such an extent that the measurable impact on children's monetised future 'life-chances', by however convoluted means, is the standard criteria by which policy initiatives and interventions are judged. Finding evidence of the positive impact of play provision on such measurements has become the holy grail of play policy advocates, however often, by our own admission, we come up short (Gill, 2014).

Brown's (2017) description of 'what is unique about playwork' identifies 'a conceptualisation of the child that actively resists dominant and subordinating narratives and practices', while Hughes (2001) posits that it is precisely the lack of order, the randomness of the environment, and the licence afforded to children to do

with it what they will, that sets adventure playgrounds apart as ideal places to play; replicating, when done properly, the wild spaces that children's evolutionary instincts need to encounter.

Wood and Kilvington (2018:42) say the playwork approach rests on a belief 'that children and young people do not need to be improved or developed' by adults and that 'playing children intuitively play in the way that is necessary' for them. Russell (2013) proposes a situated playwork ethos that 'moves beyond rational, universal rules or outcomes towards relational ethics, acknowledging the particularity of situations, emotions and the alterity of others (children and adults)'.

Any one of these perspectives is radical, heretical even, to the dominant discourse and the political-economic hegemony that perpetuates it. Whether we want to shoot the sacred cow of educational orthodoxy, turn long-established intergenerational power dynamics on their head, or bring benign anarchy and a blurring of arbitrary distinctions into a world of conformity and segregation, playwork is a challenge to established policy and practice in the children's sector, the play industry and each of their constructs of children's play.

Yet, as with any occupational field working within the public policy arena, the political-economic hegemony is also the context for our livelihoods and the resources to support our work. How then do we square the circle? The answer until now has been, in different ways and to varying degrees, to compromise. We have assumed, not unreasonably, that addressing the concerns of policymakers in their own terms would be crucial if we were to have any success at all in winning recognition and support for playwork. Where has this approach led us, and what can we learn from it?

2. Lessons from (recent) history

'What we learn from History is that no one learns from History'.

Otto von Bismarck (1815 - 1898)

'… a historical understanding of children's play agencies suggests that they were used to achieve social and economic goals of the state … children's play provision has always been a contested area of social policy'.

Keith Cranwell (2003: 52)

What can the experience of our engagement with public policy, and our simultaneous efforts to develop a distinct professional identity and extend our reach, teach us that might be useful?

Although playwork practitioners, academics and trainers have been (and continue to be) in the vanguard of advocacy for children's right to play, not just in the UK but internationally (e.g. Lester and Russell, 2010), the field is nevertheless in a crisis that is about more than the absence of a supportive policy framework. Some suggest we have a definitional crisis (Newstead, 2015) quite apart from our struggle to survive austerity.

Advocacy for improving the status of playwork has tended to focus on the fight for recognition as a new or emerging profession within the established children's workforce. During the latter 20th century there was an increasingly cohesive campaign to become better recognised by government and, hence, employers. In the 90s this coincided with a major extension in state provision for children and families: 'the childcare revolution', which saw a huge expansion of 'wrap-around' and holiday care services for school-age children as part of the government's policy to enable parents back in to work.

The childcare revolution – creating many thousands of new, registered, fee-charging places within a regulated, highly subsidised service industry – represented a threat to the free, open-access, grass-roots tradition of the adventure playgrounds, where our practice had its genesis; but also an opportunity for the field to expand and secure the recognition it aspired to. We may have wanted adventure playgrounds to receive more substantial and reliable funding, and for playwork to establish its own professional codes and structures, but here was also a chance to go truly mainstream: for playwork to become the standard approach for the expanding out-of-school childcare sector.

The field's campaigning efforts, aligned with those of others (about which more later), eventually led, in 1998, to secretary of state Chris Smith challenging the field: to establish recognised training and qualifications, identify the outcomes of playwork provision, and speak with one voice. Do this, he said, and the government would listen. While there were those who saw a risk of institutionalising what had been an organic, intuitive way of working with children (Newstead, 2015), allowing it to be subsumed within the instrumental paradigm, the promise of a fulsome government policy response was too great a prize to shun. The field had tired of struggling to survive on meagre grants and local fundraising: we hungered for a bigger slice of the public cake. Better terms and conditions, recognised qualifications, more training and career development opportunities were all desirable goals for practitioners and projects which had, until then, been largely peripheral to mainstream children's services – and perennially under-resourced.

The structures we erected during those years, the institutions we formed or became part of, and the processes we engaged with were seen as necessary steps to joining a public sector professional class that would open the door to better recognition and more resources for our work – and wider opportunities for more children to benefit from it. Or so we thought.

There was, of course, a price to pay. One problem was that, as discussed, the edifice we sought to become assimilated within was constructed upon assumptions and values quite different from our own. Another was that, in England at least, those structures were rarely governed by, or ultimately accountable to, the field itself. An examination of how each of the government's three demands was met illustrates how these two factors have taken playwork down cul-de-sacs on our journey to professional status; blind alleys from which we have yet to emerge.

Occupational standards

Taking our place in a workforce development strategy underpinning a major government policy would mean playwork practice being codified, its training and qualifications approved, within an officially sanctioned vocational framework. The development of recognised training and qualifications, the first of the government's challenges, was already substantially underway by 1998 – but recognised by whom?

Newstead (2015) documents how it was playwork trainers who had led the way with the creation in 1975 of the JNCTP, (Joint National Committee on Training for Playleadership, later Playwork), but notes that an initiative in the late 1980s to define playwork competences was superseded in 1992 by the government's own introduction of National Occupational Standards (NOS). She finds that playwork training boomed in

the light of the recognition afforded by the NOS but that this proliferation 'raised questions about the content and consistency of playwork training', with the growth in demand 'met by a range of training providers with differing experiences … resulting in varying interpretations of what constitutes good playwork practice' (Newstead, 2015: 1).

In the slipstream of this expansion – fuelled of course by the childcare revolution – during the 90s, the national training organisation for the sport and recreation professions, Sprito, and then its successor, the Sector Skills Council, SkillsActive, worked with trainers and service providers to create a national framework for playwork training and qualifications that would establish playwork as a recognised part of the mainstream children's workforce. But much as SkillsActive may have engaged with practitioners in this endeavour, its playwork unit was managed and governed by employers, accountable not to the field but to the government.

More than 25 years after their introduction – and the rapid growth and even more rapid decline in playwork jobs that followed – Newstead (2015), again, notes that the NOS have yet to properly describe what playwork is or does; posing something of an 'existential dilemma' (Newstead, 2015:5) for the profession, regardless of the extent of employment and training opportunities. Furthermore, the playwork unit at Skillsactive is currently, well, inactive, if not closed down altogether, meaning that, in England anyway, it is unclear how this dilemma is to be resolved.

Best play?

Parallel with playwork practise becoming part of the official children's workforce, government recognition would also, increasingly, mean playwork provision being managed and inspected in ways consistent with other children's services and their policy framework.

With its overarching policy not explicitly interested in children playing as an end in itself until 2008 (and then only for two years), the government's second challenge to the field in the late 90s was to identify measurable outcomes for playwork provision. This was met in the first instance by Best Play (NPFA et al, 2000), a document, produced by a broad alliance of play professionals represented by three different national bodies (none of them discretely representing the playwork perspective[1]), which aimed to tackle the perennial conundrum of how to define the aims, objectives and outcomes of

[1] One of the three, PLAYLINK, emerged from the former London Adventure Playground Association (LAPA), which could be described as a playwork support and development body but, in its later iteration, had taken on a broader play policy role.

playwork without compromising its longstanding principle of supporting and enabling children's right to play for its own sake.

Best Play asserts that the key to children accruing benefits from provision is that they are first and foremost enabled to 'extend the choice and control they have over their play, the freedom they enjoy and the satisfaction they gain from it' (NPFA et al, 2000: 13). This is the first 'outcome objective'. There follow three other 'immediate' objectives: that 'the provision: recognises the child's need to test boundaries and responds positively to that need; manages the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children safe from harm; and maximises the range of play opportunities' (NPFA et al, 2000: 14-16). So far, so playwork. The document goes on to assert that by delivering these four 'immediate objectives', provision could be expected to 'foster' some secondary, longer-term outcomes for children (objectives 5–7), such as 'self esteem', 'respect for others' and 'healthy growth and development'.

One criticism of the Best Play model concerns the principle of fully informed consent, a central tenet of research ethics (Boddy, 2016), which is more complex than implied by the adoption of a simple consent form. Although Best Play is primarily a tool to evaluate playwork services and spaces (objectives 1-4), the 'secondary' objectives, 5-7, are personal and sensitive. Monitoring such aspects of a child's life, for whatever purpose, constitutes an intimate form of social research and, it is argued, should conform to the highest ethical standards.

Yet, because Best Play is framed within the concept of 'monitoring and evaluation' it is questionable how often or how rigorously such standards were, or are, adhered to. In accumulating portfolios of 'evidence' to satisfy contextual requirements, Best Play bypasses research disciplines such as the cycle of formulating and testing hypotheses (Rudestam and Newton, 2001) and analysing data. Observation merely feeds the conceptual framework, making the process neither truly deductive nor inductive, but merely bureaucratic and self-referential.

The Best Play method was not designed for a genuine inquiry, but to find the evidence for some pre-supposed outcomes in order to satisfy extraneous demands for them. It resolved the 'fundamental tension between supporting play for its own sake and seeking public funding for work which can address identified problems of social policy' (Russell, 2018) in favour of the latter. It is a research tool that both fails to link its methodology to a theoretical and ethical perspective (Crotty, 1998) – and, it is argued, undermines the first tenet of playwork practice.

'One voice'

The third government challenge to the field in 1999, to 'speak with one voice', was met by the Children's Play Council (CPC). Originally a standing roundtable for the various national (and, later, regional) voluntary and public sector play and playwork organisations – to coordinate strategic influencing activity for children's right to play – CPC and its successor body, Play England, evolved into a quasi organisation in its own right, and can be considered in many respects to have been the hub of a highly effective advocacy network. It articulated an ultimately persuasive policy narrative for play and playwork that led to unprecedented government initiatives for play, underpinned by almost £390m of public funding from 2006-11[2].

An examination of the Play Strategy's (DCSF/DCMS, 2008) design reveals that measures to support playwork, whose advocates had been some of, if not *the*, leading voices in the campaign, were overshadowed by the degree of investment in what were euphemistically termed 'unsupervised play areas'. The fluid and pervious nature of the CPC/Play England advocacy network and the ambivalent role of its 'parent' body, the National Children's Bureau (NCB)[3], meant that the playwork perspective was always competing with others – and, crucially, had no representative body to make its arguments with due weight.

Furthermore, equipment manufacturers and their industry bodies – with their clear commercial interest in promoting a specific and already dominant form of play provision – had, via their positions within this network, unprecedented access to the policymaking process. Although Play England did not propose it, it should perhaps have come as no surprise when almost 70 per cent (£160m) of the Play Strategy budget was allocated to installing 3000 more of the fixed equipment playgrounds that are in many ways the antithesis of the playwork approach, even given Play England's (Shackell et al, 2008) government-endorsed efforts to break the mould of the sterile, risk averse approach, which had come to be characterised as the 'KFC' (Kit, Fence and Carpet)[4] playground.

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[2] An estimated £30-40m of this sum was not, in the event, spent on children's play, after the new coalition government in 2010 removed the ring-fencing of much local authority funding, and also required a percentage of unspent money to be returned to the Treasury (Voce, 2015). The precise figure is not known as the funding was no longer monitored after this time.

[3] NCB, the national children's services charity, was first a member of CPC but then became the 'host' organization under a letter of agreement under which it held contracts and employed staff on behalf of the council. In the absence of an independent CPC constitution, this, ultimately put NCB in charge, not just of CPC, but its successor, Play England and its lottery millions – until the latter became independent in 2014, with its budget long since depleted.

Who speaks for playwork?

No field speaks with one voice, but policy studies (e.g. Hill, 2005) suggest that in the messy and fluid processes of public policy formation (Acosta, 2012), the greatest influence is often exercised by actors either with the greatest capacity, or the closest connections to the current hegemony. Of course playwork has no monopoly on play advocacy, and it is inevitable that any dialogue around workforce development and public provision will include a strong representation from employers and sector industry bodies. Our challenge is to form a mandated practitioner body that can be their equal, rather than assuming that a broad alliance of the 'children's play movement' will ensure our voice is heard, or that individual practitioners and trainers can fill this role by sitting on various groups that are advisory to structures and processes where the decisions are taken elsewhere.

Sturrock and Else (1998:20) suggest that playwork's benefits to children arise precisely because practitioners are not agents of societal designs on them, and our current principles 'include acting as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas'. It is a key part of the playworker role to speak for children's play. But who speaks for playwork?

[4] KFC: Kit, Fence and carpet, a term coined by Helen Woolley, University of Sheffield, to denote the stereotypical municipal playground and its poor play value.

3. Re-situating playwork

'If the government cannot create happiness (Dekid) for its people, there is no purpose for the government to exist'

(Bhutan's legal code, dating from unification in 1729)

If one clear lesson for playwork from the play strategy experience in England is that making alliances can mean losing control of the agenda, another is that relying on allies for organisational capacity can mean losing control altogether. After the change of administration in 2010, terms like 'under the aegis of' suddenly translated as 'owned by', as host organisations scrambled to consolidate in the face of swingeing cuts and the loss of government contracts. If our field had enjoyed the patronage of larger 'parent organisations', we saw in the months and years after the financial crash that it is not only in the jungle where parents will sometimes eat their young.

As it was with our infrastructure, so it was too with national policy. Since 2010 the treatment of children's play by the UK government has mirrored precisely the place in which it is held within its informing discourse. How could it be otherwise? The financial crash of 2007-08 and the government response to it revealed how paper-thin were the platitudes of politicians calling for children to have 'everyday adventures' (Cameron, 2007) in 'spaces where they can play, where they can feel completely free' (Clegg, 2010). The new Coalition Government of the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats cancelled the 10-year Play Strategy within a month of taking office and subsequently deleted any reference to children's play from ministerial portfolios (CRAE, 2015). The current government's policy on play is that it has none.

Coupled with eight years of austerity, the absence of national policy for play has taken its toll on a field that was still emerging as a nascent profession (CRAE, 2015). Playgrounds and services have closed, qualifications withdrawn, courses cancelled. Many playworkers are redundant, or have moved on to greener pastures.

But what if austerity and the premature end of the government's play strategy in England were blessings in disguise? What if the decimation of our infrastructure bodies, as our sponsors and hosts cannibalised our resources for their own survival, is in fact precisely what needed to happen for playwork to come to the realisation that it must stand for itself and not compromise on its ethos? Indeed, what if the entire economic and political hegemony from which we have tried so hard to achieve recognition, is itself crumbling; its false premises and outmoded economic models beginning to give way to a new politics, wherein the playwork ethos is much more truly situated?

Kate Raworth (2017: 292) writes that 'if economies change by evolving … we all have a hand in shaping that evolution because our actions are continually remaking the economy, (by) enshrining living purpose in the enterprise we set up; exercising our rights to parental leave from work; contributing to the knowledge commons; and campaigning with political movements that share our economic vision'. These are individual choices. How much more of a hand might we have in evolving a new economic paradigm if we also align ourselves, as a field of practice, with a new and emerging socio-political movement?

Pilling (2018) writes how, 'in 1972, the fourth king of Bhutan made his country the first in the world to declare gross national happiness and not domestic product the prime orientation of government policy'. A fanciful notion at the time perhaps but, increasingly, the underpinning assumption of the global economic system – that consistent growth as measured in Gross Domestic Product, must be the sustaining driver of government policy – is coming into question. This is not an economic treatise (we are not qualified for that) but there are new models emerging, for governance, polity and economic management that would place a greater premium not on future-oriented education for competitive productivity and consumption, but on experiential wellbeing, cooperation, self-sufficiency and happiness.

Ludic capital, ludic commons

'For children to have the best chance to be happy, healthy and to prosper, they need to have a real stake in the common spaces of their neighbourhoods. Amongst the hustle and bustle of our modern towns and cities we need to engender local 'village' communities, where children are looked after in the widest sense. This must start with somewhere for our children - all our children - to play'.

(David Lammy MP, 2007)

The emergence of credible alternative economic models is an increasingly urgent one, as each new measure of the effects of climate change reveals the impending environmental catastrophe to be even worse than previously predicted. Such a discourse brings in to play (no pun intended) the idea of ludic capital; a kind of wealth that is generated nowhere more prolifically than in the mediated playspaces of our practice. Kane's (2004) 'The Play Ethic' may have set out a manifesto for a new way of working that is popular among the hipster classes and digital start-up companies, but wherever there are barriers to children playing freely within the public domain, it is on traditional adventure playgrounds and other playwork mediated playspaces that ludic capital is really created. The trailblazing work in places like Wrexham begins to demonstrate that the playwork approach, in a sympathetic policy context, can extend

such resources to create a ludic commons beyond the mediated playspace, into genuinely child-friendly neighbourhoods.

Where the subordination of children is no longer normalised, everything can change. Thus, in a world invested more in the presence of ludic capital than the future projection of economic achievement, and the growth of a ludic commons more than monetised, privatised 'public space', the commencing grammars of civic rule-formation, governance and what we complacently call 'democracy', can be re-imagined and rewritten.

Scientific inquiry, from many perspectives, has long established that playing is the wellspring of cultural creativity and the mainstay of children's resilience and adaptability (Lester and Russell, 2008). Ludic capital simply values this, and repositions the playspace accordingly – to the heart of *both public realm and education policy,* each designed to create optimum conditions for children to learn how to be themselves, to play out their unfinished business, to be responsible for how they use their time and their space; to learn co-operativity, custodianship, risk and relationship management and sustainable living – and many other things we cannot imagine for them – all within unique, person-centred community spaces that they can call their own.

Much has been written, within various sciences, about the relevance of play to human evolution. Currently, evolution is a theory in something of a crisis of its own, with many of its longstanding assumptions being re-evaluated. In particular, ideas about the competitive nature of intra-species, not just inter-species behaviour, as originally interpreted through the prism of the burgeoning capitalist economy of the British Empire, are coming to be seen as politically situated. 'Survival of the fittest' was a maxim that chimed well with the assumed superiority of the ruling classes and the emerging industrial powerbrokers, with their right therefore not just to exploit resources but to subjugate people. This was the 'natural order'. Recent studies suggest that evolution within species – especially social species – is more concerned with the fitness to cooperate than to compete. Damasio (2018) notes that 'the ability especially developed in humans, to work cooperatively with others to achieve a discernable, shared goal' has been a crucial quality of our species' evolution.

The playground as eco-niche

If children's play is an evolutionary imperative, then adventure playgrounds and other enriched or wild playspaces are effective eco-niches for adaptive rehearsal. In a world that dedicates the upbringing of its young to the sustenance of an economic system that is proving to be fundamentally unsustainable, attending to children's adaptation to a different order of challenges has the potential to reshape that world.

Damasio (2018) goes on to state that 'co-operativity relies on another well-developed human ability: joint attention', and that this quality is fundamental to learning. The ludic dialectic that takes place in the enriched environments of the mediated playspace is abundant in this cooperative, jointly attentive learning; such that adventure playgrounds may be seen as evolutionary hot spots: micro-ecosystems where the 'future generations' beloved of political speech writers, rather than being trained and directed towards the future we have planned for them, are busy creating their own, moment by playful moment. This is the real business of playing – but only realisable if one understands, as playworkers do, that being and becoming are not binary states but a constantly evolving dynamic. Paying attention to the outcome, rather than to the moment of playing, adulterates this dynamic and interferes with an ancient evolutionary process.

Education for what?

Within the dominant discourse this is heresy. Here, the more commonly recognised role of the adult is to steer and direct the playing child in pursuit of specific learning goals. Outside the classroom or the nursery school, the play of children – without the benefit of adult direction, is deemed unimportant, which is why playtime, or recess, is being steadily eroded.

In public policy, play is generally conceived, if at all, as instrumental to educational progress. Even on its own terms, however, education policy, is no longer fit for purpose. 64 per cent of children who left school in 1996 are doing jobs that did not then exist. The inexorable growth of automation, minituarisation and the digital economy will not only accentuate this trend but lead to the growth of a post-work society, wherein universal basic income will become an increasingly necessary solution.

These changes, compounding the effects of the financial crash, have given rise to an emerging new class. No longer able to rely on reliable employment, liveable wages or secure accommodation, millions of people around the world are effectively denizens rather than full citizens – denied the fundamental conditions of living fully participatory lives within their own communities.

The rise of 'the precariat'

Such endemic insecurity – invariably accompanied by habitat and spatial poverty – within the developed world economies, where capital wealth continues to accumulate to the richest few per cent and inequalities widen, has produced a growing state of social and economic flux. Poverty endures but is now supplemented by the even larger-

scale phenomenon of a whole class of people living on the edge. The gig-economy, zero-hours and short-term contracts, along with an increasingly unaffordable housing market, has led to the swelling of what Standing (2011) calls 'the precariat': individuals and families who are more denizen than citizen and who he describes collectively as a 'class-in-waiting'. More recent events suggest it is a class awakening – and playwork has a strong affinity with it.

This movement arises partly from within the precariat and its struggle for economic security, and partly from within other oppressed groups and their perennial fight for social and legal justice. Its political development is not along the usual left-right ideological axis, but across a spectrum of activity resisting injustice, demanding environmental action, fighting oppression and concerned with the formation of survival strategies for the post-industrial, post-work, post-patriarchal world.

This is a movement for human rights to be enshrined as citizens' rights, and therefore a congruent alignment for our advocacy and activist roles, as well as a natural context for our practice. Many of us in this field are in insecure, poorly paid jobs, if any, and work with communities at the sharp end of austerity. We can identify individually with the precariat, and our sites and our services are largely situated within it.

But playwork's position on children's rights means that our perspective on who comprises the precariat is not confined to the more deprived or insecure socio-economic classes. We are not a targeted service, problematising different groups deemed to be in need of our intervention. Our contribution to the new politics is that children as a group can be conceived as part of the precariat: denied their human rights and denied spatial justice, whatever their situation or class. The Playing Out movement may arise from within a more middle-class demographic than the typical user groups for adventure playgrounds, but it is a mistake to not recognise it as a kindred advocacy network. Wherever children are denied space to play, there is a denial of their human rights, and there should go playwork.

This perspective, which is central to our ethos, has immense unifying potential. The injustice we challenge is universal, crossing all party, class and socio-economic divides. In a sense it also binds generations together. If children are part of the precariat then are we not all, who have been children and thus disempowered and marginalised; even those of us seduced by material advantage and weighted power privilege?

The struggle we need to commit to, then, is not between different alignments of people, but between people and non-human entities: corporations, institutions, reactionary, patriarchal politics and economic dogmas. Our ethical practice delivers a vital mechanism for rebalancing power not from one group to another, but from a

dehumanised polity and self-serving economy, to individual children and communities of children, wherever and however they are situated.

A situated practice of playwork

In this vision of a new society, playwork is a shared, intra-subjective method of working with children in all contexts. We will therefore need to define and establish learning in the playspace as an innate process, and delineate a specific ludic curriculum, wherein the adult presence is not for teaching, but for co-learning: through conscious, reflective playwork. The wellbeing (and well-becoming) of both child and practitioner will each be the subject of active processes, under constant review. Practitioners will base their work on play: playing and developing through play as a method; entering into the ludic curriculum through playing; reflecting on and evaluating insights gained therein.

In this reframing of our practice, the practitioner will see playing as the commencing locus of all civic and cultural development and growth. The foundation of the ludic curriculum, in full cognisance of disciplinary boundaries, will be the conscious act of playing and developing. Playfulness and creativity will be seen as central to both the playing, developing child and the self-development of the practitioner. Self-development will be the key to continuing professional practice.

Within this default curriculum the playworker is seen as an active researcher with a practice based on an interpretive epistemological rigour. Our epistemology draws on evolutionary biology, anthropology, neuroscience, depth psychology and other academic perspectives, including the new social studies of childhood, but our practice, based on our own hermeneutic inquiry, deploying ethical, situated and non-representational research methods grounded in the privileged culture of playworking with children over many decades, is essentially original and immanent. Our situated practice will generate insights and contributions to a mainstreamed discourse about play and creativity that is crucial to our society's growing understanding of how children thrive, learn and develop.

'This is not education', they will cry from within the hegemonic establishment; 'children need to be educated and adults need to teach them'. Yet we know that playing is the 'genetic tool' that enables children's development. Learning is implicit within the playspace. The eco-niche of the adventure playground makes it an especially rich environment for the enhancement of ecological, cooperative intelligences – the eco-literacy and sustainability that is so urgently needed.

If we stay true to this, our unique practice, share it as widely and freely as we can – through training, community development and local activism – it will in time lead to the

longer-term status and recognition we aspire to; but within a new pedagogical paradigm. If we also apply it not just to the mediated playspace, but to the urgent and necessary task of reimagining the public realm to engender child-friendly, playable streets and neighbourhoods, situated within a vibrant, ludic commons peopled by resilient, sustainable communities of interdependent citizens, we will be a central and valued workforce for the emerging new economy and the society it will serve.

In this vision, the roles of teacher, playworker, youth worker and social worker converge and overlap within a holistic, ludic-creative pedagogy; recognising that what all children and all adults need is fundamentally the same: mutual respect for and realisation of their human rights within social, physical and cultural environments where they can feel safe, secure and attached, so as to play out who they are and who they are becoming.

We paint a utopian picture, perhaps. It is a world reimagined rather than anticipated. But ethical practice requires such a vision. We may never see it fully, or even partially, realised; but the playwork ethos, implied by our existing principles, compels us to ask of any given choice we are faced with, either as individual practitioners or as a collective community, 'which will bring it closer?' Thus, in the real world, as we once again regroup, forge alliances and set out to make the policy case for playwork to a seemingly unreceptive body politic, what is our narrative and its rationale, and are they congruent with this vision?

4. Solving the playwork conundrum

'And some of the bigger bears try to pretend
That they came round the corner to look for a friend;
And they try to pretend that nobody cares
Whether you walk on the lines or the squares.'

(AA Milne, 1924)

Russell (2008) notes the 'fundamental contradiction (of) understanding children's play as autotelic and self-organising on the one hand, and on the other seeking and accounting for public funding that requires services to address policy agendas'. This is indeed our perennial conundrum – but only so long as there is no policy for play informed by such an understanding.

The argument that children's rights – to play, to participate, to be heard, to have space – should be a central plank of the new politics, is a compelling one. The playwork ethos is at one with a core philosophy of universal rights and citizenship. Playwork practice is an approach that sits naturally at the heart of a reconstructed role for all those working with children in this new societal vision. And, crucially, a children's rights framework for play policy has no need to annex play to other agendas. But does such an approach have any traction with current policymakers?

Basing the policy case for children's play on a rights discourse, even since the UN CRC's (2013) general comment on article 31, is often rejected by advocates who believe, with some justification, that UK policymakers are generally ambivalent about children's rights in general, and indifferent to children's play in particular. Sutton-Smith (1997) describes how the progress rhetoric of child development 'subordinates … intrinsic play functions to other extrinsic developmental functions …' because theorists are 'primarily concerned with child socialisation and maturity, and children's civilised progress in general'. But, while Lester and Russell (2008) are undoubtedly correct in their overall thesis, that this particular bias has had a great hold on child policy, it is a mistake to regard it as an enduring maxim. Indeed, the most significant breakthroughs in modern play policy (in which Lester and Russell's critique has been a not insignificant factor), suggests this has now become a self-defeating fallacy for play policy advocates.

Arguably the most significant national government play policy anywhere in the world arises not from the drive to impact on future outcomes for children, but from an explicit commitment to children's right to play as an obligation of government. The Welsh Government Play Policy, and subsequent implementation plan, is based on the principle that, as a signatory (as part of the UK) to the UNCRC, it should therefore 'contribute to

creating an environment that fosters children's play' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2005: 1). This has provided the platform for what has been described by play advocates as 'a beautiful piece of legislation': the play sufficiency duty (Welsh Government, 2011) on local authorities to assess and plan for children's play opportunities across their area.

Although dramatically more short-lived than its counterpart in Wales, the English Play Strategy (DCSF/DCMS, 2008) also offers a counter-argument to the tactical instrumentalism espoused by the pragmatists.

The Play Strategy arose from a very different policy framework to that embraced by the Welsh Assembly; the UK government being much more ambivalent on children's rights. (Its overarching Every Child Matters policy was arguably the zenith of the target-driven, outcomes-focused approach that characterised the New Labour years). Nevertheless, after many years of advocates diligently and persistently 'making the case' (e.g. Cole-Hamilton and Gill, 2002) the Play Strategy similarly committed local government (in this case incentivised not by legislation but significant central funding[5]) to assessing children's opportunities for playing, and developing plans to extend and improve them. Bowing to pressure that 'enjoy and achieve' (one of the universal outcomes it claimed to have derived from consulting children themselves) did not mean enjoying school, the government eventually conceded that the degree of satisfaction children derived from their local play opportunities should be the only measure of the strategy's success[6] (Voce, 2015).

Notwithstanding the unhelpfully disproportionate emphasis on increasing and renewing the stock of fixed equipment playgrounds, as previously discussed, the Play Strategy demonstrated, along with the Welsh Play Policy, that government policy *can* be shaped to respond to children's need and right to play for its own sake. In fact, the model for the Play Strategy – requiring local authorities to assess their areas and prepare crosscutting local play strategies to improve opportunities – was based on a policy of the London Mayor (2004) which, like that of Welsh Assembly government, was based explicitly on children's rights.

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[5] The Play Strategy (2008) and the Children's Play (2006) lottery initiative that preceded and overlapped with it, following a government directive, committed £390m to children's play in England, over 5 years, although see footnote 2 (p14).

[6] The specific measure of the national Play Strategy's progress, and the instrument by which local authorities could (had the policy not been subsequently abandoned) secure additional, follow-on funding for their local play strategies, was a National Performance Indicator (NPI 199), introduced by the UK government in England in 2009, which simply asked children across the country to score their satisfaction with their local play opportunities.

Russell (2008) observes that the 'progress rhetoric' (Sutton-Smith, 1997) is so normalised that, even for initiatives such as these, the relevant documents are to a great extent couched in the language of the instrumental, future-focused orientation of the dominant discourse, but this should not cloud the fact that only 10 or so years ago three major government administrations in the Britain – London, Wales and the UK (for England) – each adopted substantial, strategic measures to improve and extend children's opportunities to play as a policy objective in its own right. From the evidence of experience then, there is no reason to believe that instrumental designs on children's play are the only basis for its consideration by serious government policy – quite the contrary.

This is important. The pragmatic argument is that the rationale for supporting children's play is irrelevant, so long as it is supported, but this assumes that policy aims do not shape the design of services, influence practice or ultimately affect children's behaviours. Yet research in Canada finds that framing children's play within a health agenda, for example, has the effect of narrowly defining it in a way that disregards much of its epistemology and can lead to distortion, neglecting some kinds of playing in favour of others. In particular, 'by regulating children's play to be healthy and active, and thus normalising the ways in which children are encouraged to play, other relevant qualities of play may be neglected' (Alexander et al, 2014: 155). In the language of playwork, certain play types become privileged over others – even from children's own perspective.

This is adulteration embedded in policy, and it is part of our ethical practice as advocates for play to resist it. Part of our narrative is the scientific case for the importance of playing as an end in itself, and the provision of space – social and emotional, as well as physical space – for children to engage in all play types. This does not preclude extoling the benefits of playing – indeed this is another key part of the narrative – but it does rule out annexing children's play to serve other agendas.

A new policy for play?

'Play is essential, not an optional extra. The UNCRC recognises the right "to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child". But for many local authorities there is now no budget for maintenance or improvements to play areas'.

Jeremy Corbyn (2015)

If any senior politician of any stripe, let alone the leader of one of the two main parties, declares for children's right to play and the government's responsibility to deliver on it, we should be exploiting what they say for all it is worth. Jeremy Corbyn's statement

about play was not part of a Labour Party initiative, but his response to a wide-ranging report from an All Party Parliamentary Group (2015), with prominent members from all sides of both houses, including Sarah Woollaston, the influential Conservative chair of the Health Select Committee and Baroness Floella Benjamin, the popular and high profile children's champion who represents the Liberal Democrats.

Children's play may be their 'forgotten right', but when people are reminded of it, it resonates. If we can be organised and strategic enough to engage with them, play advocates still have friends and allies in positions of major influence across the political spectrum. The cause of children's right to play is as strong and relevant as ever. Playwork can be – must be – in the vanguard of the lobby to build on the political support for that cause.

It is true that the policies in England and Wales that bucked the instrumentalist trend and set such dramatic precedents for government action on children's right to play were adopted in a different era. Although little more than a decade has passed, the financial crash, and the UK government's response to it since 2010, has changed the landscape entirely. But this is a reason for optimism, not pessimism. The reversal of the breakthrough in England was caused by a major, global economic event, not because the policy failed, or even fell out of favour per se.

When the tide turns, as it must, there is no reason to believe children's play will not again become a priority. Constructing a comprehensive national policy for children's play is not part of a utopian dream. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child says it is an obligation of government now. There is no one better qualified then the playwork community, working with allies but clear about our own agenda, to interpret that obligation for the UK context.

Conclusion

"For playworkers, the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas".

The Playwork Principles (PPSG, 2005)

What we have outlined is a long-term vision for playwork practice as the standard approach to working with children in redesigned public services and within a reimagined, de-institutionalised public realm, where adventure playgrounds are far more numerous and better resourced; where schools are increasingly places of playful co-learning and creativity, adopting more and more of the ludic curriculum; where playfulness, well-being, co-operativity and sustainable living are at the heart of mainstream education; and public spaces are conceived and maintained as common, playable areas for the enjoyment of the whole community and the nurturance of our shared eco-system.

The full realisation of this vision can only be achieved through a substantial change in the dominant discourse around education, child development and children's rights – and a shift in the political-economic paradigm that sustains it. But incremental steps towards its fulfilment from a playwork perspective are more achievable than is generally imagined in the wake of austerity and its impact on our field.

The rationale and framework for government play policy set out in General Comment 17 (CRC, 2013) is our bridge between the playwork ethos, the world it imagines, and a credible case for play policy now. The means by which we traverse this bridge is our advocacy. The fuel for the journey is our faith.

Recommendations

'Narrative has been observed to be central to the policy process – constituting public policy instruments, persuading decision makers and the public, and shaping all stages of the policy process'

(Deserai Crow and Michael Jones, 2018)

If this 'think-piece' resonates in any way, then let it be also a call to arms. The paradigm will not shift itself. But we are pragmatists too. Every journey begins with a single step and we do not want to end this contribution without suggesting some achievable objectives for the current playwork community.

1. Adopt a cohesive playwork narrative

Crow and Jones (2018) observe that narrative is the key to policy advocacy, finding that an over-reliance on either empirical evidence (the 'knowledge fallacy') or emotional appeals (the 'empathy fallacy') tend to lead to miscommunication and ultimate failure. Rather, they suggest, effective advocates must have a good story to tell. It should be deeply grounded in science and ethics, but also be relatable and follow the timeless conventions of storytelling; plot, victim, villain and hero (where ones policy proposals are clearly the hero).

Playwork has a very good story to tell and there are many excellent iterations of it by some accomplished storytellers. The policy narrative we need will bind these together in a way that accommodates the different perspectives that have evolved, and communicates our compelling moral to a wide audience.

2. Make the policy case for children's right to play

We suggest that the bridge to public policy should be a well-developed interpretation of children's right to play. Article 31 of the UNCRC (1989) as elaborated in General Comment 17 (UNCRC, 2013), is, in essence, an authoritative, relatable policy narrative, which the playwork community, having been in the vanguard of its advocacy, is uniquely placed to interpret for the UK policy context. The field should organise itself to produce such an interpretation and build a policy-influencing campaign around it.

3. Consolidate around a new professional body for playwork

If the playwork narrative is not to be hijacked by other agendas in its transition from storytelling to policymaking, it will need a custodian. In the same way that an author

must copyright their work, the playwork community must take ownership of its own material and be responsible for how it is articulated and purveyed. Our history tells us that we cannot rely on even seemingly natural allies to make our judgments for us about where to compromise and where to stand on principle in the advocacy process. We must adopt our own vehicle for this and then support it, use it and hold it accountable[7].

4. Review playwork training and qualifications and their infrastructure

Once our narrative is agreed and our representative body is in place and fit for purpose, playwork should review its training and qualifications landscape, engaging with employers, government and accrediting bodies to establish an appropriate framework in which the ultimate arbiter of what constitutes playwork practice, however the policy and regulatory context may change, is determined by the profession itself.

4. Renew alliances for the right to play

With our narrative fully articulated and positioned within a widely recognised policy context, and with a nascent professional body to fight our corner, we should not be shy about making alliances, old and new, but be clear-eyed about them, and retain control of our own structures and processes.

Perhaps it is time to resurrect or reinvent the idea of a children's play council (or perhaps councils, helping to form groups locally to advocate for their own communities). A regrouped playwork sector with its refreshed narrative and representative body should be a leading member of any play coalition, building stronger and more coordinated links with the different movements for street play, play in schools and child friendly cities, for example, where we have many natural allies.

5. Build a national campaign

This means having a bold, clear and mandated set of policy asks that emerge naturally from the narrative – and some resources to hone, amplify and communicate them – to create a manifesto.

We can suggest some asks – cabinet level responsibility for national play policy; a statutory duty on local authorities to maintain a fully funded and regularly reviewed local area play strategy based on an assessment of sufficiency (learning from the

[7] One of us, Voce, must declare an interest here, as a founding trustee of the Playwork Foundation, which aims, among other things, to build a professional body for playwork.

experience of Wales); basic playwork training for teachers and Ofsted inspectors; a return to a minimum level of playwork training and qualifications for all out-of-school play and care staff; a hypothecated tax on electronic and digital toys and media to fund new and existing adventure playgrounds and training for playworkers.

We could go on, but the way to build a campaign is to first listen to the voices of those on the front-line, and in their communities. What do playworkers most need from public policy? Most importantly, what do children and their parents most need from their local authorities to improve and enhance their play lives, and how can government policy best help to achieve it?

These are the questions we should be asking now in order that our narrative is responsive to the needs of our public. At the same time, let us continue to take our practice into the fertile ground of the awakening new politics and join our fellow denizens in building the new world.

Adrian Voce and Gordon Sturrock
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