# The Process of Play in a Playwork Context

## Shelly Newstead and Pete King

Playwork is a recognised profession in the UK and the practice of playwork is currently growing internationally. Within playwork, play is currently defined as "a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated" (Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group (PPSG), 2005, p. 1). This chapter outlines how this playwork definition of play was originally developed and has since been widely adopted at national and international policy levels. The tensions for practice created by the playwork definition of play are also discussed, which may result in children's experience of playwork being very different to that intended by the current definition of play. It is proposed that a revised definition of 'playwork play' may enable more children to truly experience 'free play' in the name of playwork.

---

S. Newstead (✉)
Common Threads Publications Ltd, Wells-next-the-Sea, UK
e-mail: shelly@commonthreads.org.uk

P. King (✉)
Department of Education and Childhood Studies, Swansea University, Swansea, UK
e-mail: p.f.king@swansea.ac.uk

© The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2021

P. King, S. Newstead (eds.), *Play Across Childhood*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-72461-0_8

# Introduction

Playwork is a recognised occupation within the United Kingdom and is defined as:

> a highly skilled profession that enriches and enhances children's play. It takes place where adults support children's play, but it is not driven by prescribed education or care outcomes. (SkillsActive, 2010, p. 3)

Playwork has generally been associated with working with school-aged children (in the United Kingdom (UK), 4–15 years old), although a playwork approach is increasingly being used with preschool children (Chan et al., 2020). Traditionally, playwork has taken place within dedicated play settings, such as adventure playgrounds, parks and open spaces (Chilton, 2018). However, a playwork approach is increasingly being adopted in a much broader range of settings, such as out-of-school care provision (King & Newstead, 2019a), prisons (Woodall & Kinsella, 2017) and hospitals (Matsudaira, 2020). A playwork practitioner is usually known as a 'playworker', although other job titles are used in non-traditional playwork settings (Cartmel & Worch, 2020). This is particularly the case in an international context where the job of 'playworker' does not exist (van Rooijen, 2020). Whilst professional playwork qualifications have been developed in the UK, in recent years there has been a trend towards deregulation which has created inconsistency where regulatory requirements still exist (see, e.g. Gov.UK, 2020; Welsh Government (WG), 2016). Currently there is no need for anybody to hold a specific playwork qualification in order to call themselves a playworker, both in the UK and worldwide.

Playwork is supported by the Playwork Principles (PPSG, 2005) which purport to "describe what is unique about play and playwork, and provide the playwork perspective for working with children and young people" (PPSG, p. 1). The question of what playworkers do and why has been one which has been much debated in the playwork field over the last 70 years (Newstead, 2019). However, the Playwork Principles currently provide the following definition with the Playwork Principle No. 5: "The role of the playworker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play" (PPSG, 2005, p. 1). Within these play spaces, the role of the adult in playwork is conceptualised as a provider and facilitator of play (Newstead, 2004), which is achieved through the proactive provision of 'play opportunities' by adults (Joint National Committee on Training for Playwork (JNCTP), 1997; Stobart, 2001).

Playwork has its own distinct understanding of play, originally developed by adventure playground worker and playwork theorist Bob Hughes in the 1980s and drawn from existing play literature (see, e.g., Bruner, 1972; Garvey, 1977). Within playwork, play within the Playwork Principles is understood as "a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated" (PPSG, 2005, p. 1). This chapter examines the strengths and tensions of the theoretical and practical applications of this playwork approach to play as a process. It begins by describing how the playwork description of play was developed and explores the implications for policy and practice of this approach to play within a global context. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the playwork understanding of play and argues that the development of the playwork definition of play might further support children in today's supervised settings to experience play as a process.

## Historical Account of the Development of 'Playwork Play'

The contemporary focus on play is a relatively new one in terms of the history of the development of the playwork field. This section provides an historical account of how the playwork definition of play was originally developed in the 1980s as a response to unfavourable conditions for playwork, and how the playwork field subsequently assumed its modern-day persona of play.

The contemporary occupation and practice of playwork originated in the UK adventure playgrounds set up just after the Second World War (Newstead, 2016). Adventure playgrounds were a new idea from Denmark, imported by Lady Allen of Hurtwood (Hurtwood, 1946) and then re-created all over the UK by local individuals and groups. Once the challenges of creating and operating the physical spaces of adventure playgrounds had been mastered, the adventure playground pioneers turned their attentions to the tricky problem of defining their newly created adult role within these unorthodox spaces for children. However, this task proved far more challenging than the creation of adventure playgrounds themselves. By the end of the 1970s, those involved in creating this brand new job role had made little progress in articulating what made a playworker a playworker, and had reluctantly come to the conclusion that playworkers were probably 'born, not made' (Allen & Nicholson, 1975; Lambert, 1974).

As alternative and often controversial provision for children, adventure playgrounds in the UK have frequently had to fight for their survival. Funding was often in short supply due to a general lack of public recognition and acceptance, and many adventure playgrounds had to close as a result (King George's Jubilee Trust, 1955; National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) 1960). A further threat presented itself in the 1970s in the form of 'health and safety' (Hughes, 2006). The Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) (Health and Safety Executive (HSE), 2020) was essentially aimed at workplaces and factories in an attempt to create safer working conditions for employees. However, this new health and safety legislation posed something of a challenge for adventure playgrounds, where playworkers allowed (and sometimes positively encouraged) children to take "self-calculated risks" (NPFA, 1984, p. 4). This approach resulted in what could be described as hazardous conditions on adventure playgrounds, and sometimes even injury. In the absence of any coherent rationale to explain their role, playworkers struggled to articulate their seeming 'anti-health and safety' approach or why they believed that it was important for children. As a result, several adventure playgrounds were closed and many others had their adventure surgically removed (Chilton, 2018).

Faced with challenges on several fronts, including lack of funding, the health and safety agenda and the creation of childcare for school-aged children (Chilton, 2018), playworkers in the 1980s became increasingly concerned about the complete obliteration of adventure playgrounds and their unique offer to children (King, 1988; Williams, 1986). Several playworkers recognised the problems of not being able to justify their approach in the face of more powerful agendas and set about trying to articulate their own distinctive agenda (Shier, 1991), a task which had essentially been abandoned by the previous generation of adventure playground pioneers.

Various ideas were put forward as the reason for the existence of playwork and its unique practices, including playwork as community development (O'Grady, 1986), playwork as informal education (Burkhardt, 1977) and playwork as an anti-social behaviour measure (Johnson, 1990). Rather than agreeing on one unique agenda, debates and disagreements about the nature and purpose of playwork raged throughout the sector, including disputes about whether playwork could or should be defined at all (Benjamin, 1961; PlayEducation, 1983). However, one narrative appears to have gained more traction than others, which was the importance of play for children. In a deliberate attempt "to take up our philosophy of the '60's, drag it, squealing, into the '80's and make it durable" (Hughes & Williams, 1982a, p. 8), Bob Hughes and Hank Williams (both experienced adventure playground workers and employed by the National Playing Fields Association at the time) wrote a series of articles which conceptualised the rationale for playwork in terms of defending and promoting the importance of play in children's lives. This rallying call for playwork to justify its existence in terms of play was based on the notion of adventure playgrounds as spaces which compensated children for a general lack of opportunities for children to play in wider society (Hughes & Williams, 1982a, 1982b, 1982c, 1982d, 1982e).

Hughes and Williams' (1982a) exposition of playworkers as providers and facilitators of play provided the 'missing link' in the long battle for a shared meaning of playwork. Whilst not all playworkers were involved in community development, or were particularly concerned with 'anti-social behaviour', or favoured the idea of playwork as an extension of the education system, what they did share was the experience of playing children on their adventure playgrounds and the could recognise the value of play as Hughes and Williams (1982) described it. Universally applicable to adventure playgrounds across the UK, this "ludic mantra" (Candler, 1999, p. 230) was widely adopted by playworkers who had finally gained a definitive purpose and language with which to describe their new-found aims. Playwork's reinvigorated identity gained popular support in theory and practice and became cemented in the playwork literature:

> playwork is the specific act of affecting the "whole environment" with the deliberate intention of improving opportunities for play (Playboard, 1984 cited in Brown, 2003, p. 54)

In 1985, the Joint National Committee on Training for Playwork (JNCTP) published *Recommendations on Training for Playwork* (also known as 'the Salmon book') which defined playwork as " an adult occupation concerned explicitly and directly with play" and also included Hughes' original definition of play as "behaviour which is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated" (JNCTP, 1985, p. 16). In 1986, Hank Williams made an impassioned plea (published by PlayEducation, which was set up by Bob Hughes and his partner, Annie Perrono) for playwork to focus on the importance of play: "I have always felt that playwork undersold the value of play due to the need to sell the value of playwork" (Williams, 1986, p. 3).

However, not everybody involved in adventure playgrounds/playwork was so enamored by this new-found philosophy of playwork. Frank King, a well-respected adventure playground worker in Bristol at the time, warned of the dangers of developing a knee-jerk rationale for the existence of playwork out of necessity and challenged the conceptualisation of playworkers as providers and facilitators of play: "one of the fundamental mistakes we've been making is to fail to recognise, or at least to communicate, that what we do or cannot do, is provide play" (King, 1988, p. 2). For Heseltine (1982), locating playwork's rationale in play was an imperfect, short-sighted solution to a much more complex problem: "Play and play leadership are only the means to an end, yet we've come to see them as the end. Probably because we don't know what the real end is" (Heseltine, 1982, no page number).

Despite such misgivings, the rationale of play as the justification for playwork in a play-deprived world was widely adopted by popular playwork consent. The need for children to experience play as 'freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated' became the new imperative on which adventure playgrounds and playwork were founded and operated (Armitage, 2014). On 16 December 1991, the UK Government ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), 1989), which included the specific right to play within Article 31. This global policy further legitimised the emerging playwork claims about the need for adults to promote and defend children's right to play and for a qualified workforce to drive this important agenda (Shier, 1996). By 1991, the National Children's Play and Recreation Unit (NCPRU) had set up an accreditation scheme for playworkers which specified competency in terms of providing and facilitating children's play (NCPRU, 1991). The Assumptions and Values of Playwork, which underpinned the first set of National Occupational Standards for Playwork (1992), were also constructed around the espoused need for children to experience the form of play preferred by playworkers:

> Children's play is freely chosen, personally directed behaviour, motivated from within; through play, the child explores the world and her or his relationship with it, elaborating all the while a flexible range of responses to the challenges she or he encounters. By playing the child learns and develops as an individual. (no page number)

Over the last thirty years, playwork theory has been further developed to reinforce playwork's professional identity in terms of providing and facilitating play. The current National Occupational Standards for Playwork are underpinned by the Playwork Principles (PPSG, 2005), which are also based on the concept of play as the primary focus of playworkers and include a version of Hughes' original definition of play as "a process which is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated" (PPSG, 2005, p. 1). Hughes' 'play types' theory and Sturrock and Else's 'play cycle' theory (Hughes, 2002; King & Sturrock, 2019; Sturrock & Else 1998) support the need for playworkers to recognise the importance of play for children and for adults to enable children to play in a way which is "freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated" (PPSG, 2005, p. 1). Nicholson's (1971) 'theory of loose parts' is also now widely used to create opportunities for children to make choices about what they play with and how they use materials (Besse-Patin et al., 2017). Playworkers therefore now regard themselves as providers and facilitators of play as “a process which is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated” (PPSG, 2005, p. 1) in a play-deprived world in both theory and practice (King & Waibel, 2016).

## The Influence of ‘Playwork Play’ on National and International Policy

Although a relatively modern rationale for the existence of playwork, in recent decades the playwork approach to play has had a significant impact on policy and practice internationally. This section discusses how playwork’s understanding of play as “a process which is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated” (PPSG, 2005, p. 1) has impacted policy at an international and state level.

As previously mentioned in this chapter, the importance of play in children’s lives is reflected globally in the 54 Rights within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. As of 2020, all countries within the UN have adopted and ratified the UNCRC except for the United States.

Article 31 of the UNCRC states:

1. States 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.
2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity. (UNICEF, 1989, p. 10)

In 2013 the United Nations published ‘General Comment No. 17’ as a supplement to Article 31, with the primary objective to “enhance the understanding of the importance of Article 31 for children’s well-being and development; to ensure respect for and strengthen the application of the rights under Article 31” (UN, 2013, pp. 3–4). Playwork’s original adventure playground intentions for providing children with time and space to do what mattered to them (Newstead, 2016) and the development of the modern-day playwork description of play by second generation adventure playground workers significantly underpinned this international initiative to secure time for 'free play' for children. The need for a General Comment was spearheaded by the International Play Association (IPA), originally called the International Adventure Playground Association and created by highly influential adventure playground pioneers, including C.T. Sørensen, Lady Allen of Hurtwood, Drummond Abernethy and Arvid Bengtsson (Allen and Nicholson, 1975). The concern of the contemporary IPA, which led to the creation of the General Comment, was that the right to play as stated by Article 31 was being generally understood as the right for adults to use play to achieve adult agendas (such as education of children), rather than children's right to direct their own play in their own time and in their own way, as implied by the playwork definition of play. The case for children's play being understood as a process within the General Comment No. 17 was further supported by an extensive literature undertaken by Lester and Russell (2008), both experienced adventure playground workers who continued to work within the playwork field (Lester, 2016; Russell, 2005).

Within the United Kingdom, all four countries have developed play policies as a result of the input and influence of playworkers and/or the playwork definition of play. The first national play policy was published in 2002 in Wales and there are now play policies in Scotland (Scottish Government (SG), 2013) and Northern Ireland (Office for First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), 2008; 2010; 2011). England did have a play strategy (DCFS/DCMS, 2007), but the change in Government in 2008 and the subsequent austerity measures resulted in the abandonment of this strategy (Voce, 2015) and England does not currently have a play policy.

Across these United Kingdom policies, there is similarity in how play is defined and considered as a process, reflecting the definition of play being 'freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated'. For example, both Wales and Scotland state:

> play encompasses children's behaviour which is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. It is performed for no external goal or

> reward, and is a fundamental and integral part of healthy development – not only for individual children, but also for the society in which they live. (Welsh Assembly Government (WAG), 2002, p. 3, Scottish Government (SG), 2013, p. 16)

Whilst Northern Ireland (OFMDFM, 2008) makes a very similar statement within their play implementation plan:

> Play is satisfying to the child, creative for the child and freely chosen by the child. Play may or may not involve equipment, be boisterous and energetic or quiet and contemplative, be done with other people or on one's own, have an end product or not, be light hearted or very serious. (Office for the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), 2008, p. 3)

Although now defunct, the English Play Strategy (DCFS/DCMS, 2007) was also based on the playwork definition of play:

> This Strategy defines play as children and young people following their own ideas and interests, in their own way and for their own reasons, having fun while respecting themselves and others (p. 11)

In respect of areas of professional practice, the Welsh play policy implementation plan (WAG, 2006) has a specific focus on playwork, as reflected in their theme of "A Playwork Profession" (p. 13). Although they refer to an "integrated children's workforce" within the two themes of "Play in Schools" (p. 8) and "Play in the Community" (p. 10), the focus is very much on playwork, particularly open access play within the community with some cross-professional considerations. This cross-professional aspect is more explicitly stated within the Scottish play strategy (SG, 2013), which also includes the role of parents, both within and outside of the home, and intergenerational play. The role of parents is also considered within the Northern Ireland play strategy in respect of children's development and community cohesion by "contributing to community and society".

The Welsh Government also now has the Children and Families Measures (Act) 2010, which was the first legislation specifically including statutory guidance for children's play (WG, 2014) as part of addressing the child poverty agenda. Since 2012, each of the 22 local authorities in Wales has undertaken a play sufficiency assessment every three years. For the first time within the UK, this policy made the provision of play a statutory duty where:

1. A Local Authority must assess the sufficiency of play opportunities in its area for children in accordance with regulations.
2. A Local Authority must secure sufficient play opportunities in its area for children, so far as reasonably practicable. (WG, 2010, p8)

A play sufficiency toolkit has been constructed by a planning group which had a strong playwork contribution (WG, 2015). This play sufficiency toolkit links to the statutory guidance (WG, 2014) which refers to the 2002 Play Policy and therefore reflects the playwork definition of play being 'freely chosen'. This move to implement play provision as a statutory duty has also recently been followed in Scotland where there is now a duty under the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 (Legislation.gov.uk, 2020), which states that:

(1) A planning authority must assess the sufficiency of play opportunities in its area for children in preparing an evidence report. (the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, 16C)

Essentially constructed on playwork's espoused appeal for more 'free play' in children's lives, these international and national policies and statutory duties have highlighted children's varying experiences of play and the need for adults to recognise the value of play from a child's perspective.

## The Influence of ‘Playwork Play’ on Local Policy and Practice

As the previous section describes, the playwork definition of play as “a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated” (PPSG, 2005, p. 1) has been highly influential at national and international policy level. As discussed earlier, the playwork definition of play was originally conceived as a rationale for the purpose of playwork and a justification for the existence of playworkers in the face of adversity in the 1980s. However, implementing a philosophical foundation of providing and facilitating play as “a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated” (PPSG, 2005, p. 1) has created several challenges at a practical and conceptual level.

First of all, the notion that playworkers exist in order to provide the sort of play which negates the need for adults creates something of an existential dilemma, as described here by Conway (2003):

> Professional playwork practice is thus faced with squaring the circle of maintaining the child’s sense of autonomy and control over their own play experiences within adult interventions within their play space and time. (p. 105)

There is an inherent contradiction between the notion of play as a process which is completely child-led and child-directed, and the conceptualisation of the playworker as a provider of that form of play. In playwork, it is children who should make the decisions about how and what they play. The process of play, or the “content and intent”, should always remain with the child (Hughes, 1996, p. 22). However, conceptualised as providers of play, it is the adult playworkers who are responsible for determining children’s “projected play needs” (Hughes, 1996, p. 36) and then providing for those play needs through the planning of ‘play opportunities’ (Walters, 2008). Playworkers are thereby elevated to a position of authority where they are responsible for the quantity and quality of the play process, in direct contradiction to their own guiding construct of play as being chosen and directed by the children.

Furthermore, play is ‘enriched by skilled playworkers’ (Play England, 2009) who choose an ‘intervention style’ that extends play (PPSG, 2005). This intentional intervention makes it more likely that they will “adulterate” (Sturrock & Else, 1998, p. 93) the play, generally understood as the undesirable practice of transforming children’s play with adult ideas and agendas (Kilvington & Wood, 2018). Adulteration is widely condemned in the playwork literature (MacIntyre, 2007; Sutton, 2014), and yet the contemporary conceptualisation of playworkers as providers and facilitators of the play process legitimises adulteration as not only an acceptable but a desirable practice in playwork.

A further challenge to putting the playwork definition of play into practice is that it is highly debateable whether play which takes place in settings supervised by adults can ever be accurately described as a process which is ‘freely chosen’ and ‘personally directed’ (Brown, 2008). The intention behind the playwork definition of play is to describe “the freedom which play allows for children when the interests of others, especially those of the adult world, recede into the background” (NPFA, 2000, p. 6). However, Hughes’ original description of play was based on his adventure playground experience in the days before regulation and legislation, where children were not only purposefully left to their own devices, but also there were very few playworkers to keep an eye on them (Hughes, 1975). By contrast, the reality for many children spending their free time in modern-day supervised settings is that it is nigh on impossible for them to escape ‘the interests of others’, be that the interests of those that own or operate the setting, the budget holders, parents, policy makers or other stake holders. Children therefore frequently have to negotiate their way through a series of adult pre-defined possibilities about how to organise and conduct their play processes, which may include restrictions on resources, limitations created by the environment and the availability (or otherwise) of appropriate play partners (Howard & King 2014).

Even in the most permissive of supervised settings, children may still find it difficult to escape the interests of adults. Many settings in which children are compelled to spend their leisure time are required to uphold strict ratios of adults to children. The pervasive presence of adults can result in children’s experiences being filtered through the perspectives and experiences of the playworkers doing the supervising. For example, children's experience of risk-taking in supervised settings is influenced by the personal and professional interests of the adults in the setting (van Rooijen & Newstead, 2017). Whilst some adults may fully support the child's right to experience play which is "freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated", it is by no means guaranteed that all adults will interpret this to its fullest extent. Referring to the Assumptions and Values of Playwork (1992), Hughes (1996) vividly highlighted this contradiction between playwork policy and practice: "I have been to many playwork organisations which have stated values on the office wall and that's normally the last reference I've seen to them. The reality has been that they articulate the values of Christ and implement the working practices of Genghis Khan" (p. 5). In a survey of playwork settings by SkillsActive (2006), children said that they wanted "freedom and choice" (p. 24), yet several studies have found that children's 'choice' can be limited to choosing from a variety of activities organised by playworkers (Smith & Barker, 2000; Cole-Hamilton, 2002).

It is therefore questionable whether play as "a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated" (PPSG, 2005, p. 1) is achievable for children in many contemporary settings, either from a philosophical or a practical perspective. Playwork's cherished conceptualisation of play has also come under pressure with the growth of playwork into a wide range of non-traditional settings in an international context (Cartmel & Worch, 2020). In the 40 years since the original definition of playwork play was adopted, adults working in a wide range of understandably restrictive settings such as prisons and hospitals have sought inspiration from playwork. Despite best intentions, it is often a practical impossibility for adults working in such settings to provide or facilitate play which is completely under the control of the child. Furthermore, in the recent global pandemic, children's opportunities to engage in play as "a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated" (PPSG, 2005) have become limited even in traditional playwork settings, where opportunities to develop their own play processes have been curtailed by restrictions such as sharing equipment (King, 2020). Recent work by Willans (2020) has also called into question the notion of some children with specific needs being able to engage in play as defined in the Playwork Principles, pointing to the need for adults to be actively involved in the play process in order to support some children in their play. Under the current playwork definition of play, such active involvement and sometimes taking a lead would be regarded as adulteration (Sturrock & Else, 1998) as it defies the concept of minimalist adult intervention—or as Hughes (1996) put it, “no approach, no need” (p. 51).

Unable to provide the ideal of ‘playwork play’, some playworkers have become disillusioned with the current playwork philosophy of play as ‘purist playwork’ and abandoned it in favour of more adult-led pedagogical approaches (Smith, 2010; King, 2020). This has led to the creation of new interpretations of the rationale for playwork, such as adult-led educational and developmental agendas (King & Newstead, 2019), which legitimise adulteration in the name of playwork. As a result, another raft of meanings of ‘playwork’ has been developed, including play as learning through play, health interventions and social development (King & Newstead, 2019a). Children may therefore experience ‘playwork’ in the form of educational enhancement and child development interventions, rather than as an opportunity for them to experience play as a process which is fully under their control. Whilst knowledge of playwork theory, such as the play cycle, play types and loose parts (Sturrock & Else, 1998; Hughes, 2002; Nicholson, 1971), has helped some practitioners to focus on the process of play for children rather than the outcome (King & Newstead, 2019a, 2019b), playwork training and qualifications have been in decline for several years (Dallal, 2015). Less training and education of adults who call themselves playworkers (or playwork practitioners) means that exposure to playwork theory is reliant on individual motivation and interest (King & Newstead, 2020). Adults without a full understanding of play as “a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated” (PPSG, 2005) may be more likely to organise and structure children’s play in their free time, particularly if they work in settings where more restrictive practices are required.

Despite Hughes and Williams’ best efforts to secure the future of playwork by providing it with a philosophical foundation of play (Hughes & Williams, 1982a, 1982b, 1982c, 1982d), the current definition of playwork play has created real challenges in terms of its practical application and for the development of playwork as a modern-day profession. Whilst international and national policies support the playwork approach to play, in reality children across the world may be unable to experience a real freedom to play in supervised settings for a range of pragmatic and ideological reasons as described above. A fresh approach to describing and defining ‘playwork play’ may liberate children (and adults) from the current definition’s conceptual constraints and provide clarity for practitioners working in a range of settings to put the playwork approach to play into practice. It could also help to further distinguish playwork from other professions which use play to achieve adult agendas when working with children, for as Gladwin (2008) observed, there are many adults working in supervised settings who could facilitate children’s free play with relevant professional support. This could then lead to more children experiencing play on their own terms within the constraints of the supervised settings in which they find themselves.

## Conclusion

The philosophy of what is commonly known as ‘free play’ has underpinned the UK playwork field for the last 40 years (American Journal of Play, 2008). This chapter has described how the current definition of playwork play, as “a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated” (PPSG, 2005), has been widely adopted at international and national policy levels. However, it has also been demonstrated that the practical application of the playwork definition of play creates several tensions and dilemmas for playwork practitioners, which may result in children’s experience of playwork being very different to that intended by the playwork definition of play. It is proposed that a revised definition of ‘playwork play’ may enable more children to truly experience ‘free play’ in the name of playwork.

## References

Allen, Lady Allen of Hurtwood. (1946). Why Not Use Our Bomb Sites Like This? *Picture Post*, 26–27.

Allen, M., & Nicholson, M. (1975). *Lady Allen of Hurtwood Memoirs of an Uneducated Lady*. Thames and Hudson.

Armitage, M. (2014). Playwork: The Anarchy Wing of Sociology. In C. Burke & K. Jones (Eds.), *Education, Childhood and Anarchism. Talking Colin Ward* (pp. 113–122). Routledge.

Benjamin, J. (1961). *In Search of Adventure. A Study of the Junk Playground*. National Council of Social Services.

Besse-Patin, B., Gilles, B., & Roucous, N. (2017). Losing the 'monopoly': A French Experience of Playwork Practice. *Journal of Playwork Practice, 4*, 23–37.

Brown, F. (2003). Playwork: Theory and Practice. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Brown, F. (2008). The Playwork Principles: A Critique. In F. Brown & C. Taylor (Eds.), *Foundations of Playwork* (pp. 123–127). Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Bruner, J. S. (1972). Nature and Uses of Immaturity. In J. Bruner, A. Jolly & K. Sylva (Eds.) (1976). *Play: Its Role in Development and Evolution* (pp. 28–64). Penguin Books Ltd.

Burkhardt, B. (1977) The Educational Function and Facilities of Adventure Playgrounds. : University of London (King's College).

Candler, P. A. (1999). *Cross-national Perspectives on the Principles and Practice of Children's Play Provision*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation. De Montfort University, Leicester.

Cartmel, J., & Worch, E. (Eds.). (2020). *Playwork Practice at the Margins*. Routledge.

Chan, P., Wong, A., Fung, S., Kwok, N., & Pui, L. (2020). Playwork Play Works. In J. Cartmel & R. Worch (Eds.), *Playwork Practice at the Margins* (pp. 39–56). Routledge.

Chilton, T. (2018). Adventure Playgrounds: A Brief History. In F. Brown & B. Hughes (Eds.), *Aspects of Playwork: Play & Culture Studies* (Vol. 14, pp. 157–178). Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group.

Cole-Hamilton, I. (2002). Something Good and Fun: Children's and parents' views on play and out-of-school provision. In I. Cole-Hamilton, A Harrop & C. Street (2002). *Making the case for play Gathering the Evidence* (pp. 3–34). London: National Children's Bureau Enterprises Ltd.

Conway, M. (2003). Professional Playwork Practice. In F. Brown (Ed.), *Playwork – Theory and Practice* (pp. 101–113). Open University Press.

Dallal, J. (2015). A Quest to Professionalise Playwork Through Higher Education. *Journal of Playwork Practice, 2*, 71–75.

Department for Children, Schools & Families and Schools/Department for Culture, Media & Sport. (2007). *A Commitment from the Children's Plan Play Strategy*. DCSF.

Garvey, C. (1977). *The Developing Child: Play*. Harvard University Press.

Gladwin, M. (2008). *Let's Get off Our Ice Floe and into the Swim: A Provocation – Ideas Paper 9*. Play England.

GOV.UK. (2020). *Childminders and Childcare Providers: Register with Ofsted.* Accessed at https://www.gov.uk/guidance/childminders-and-childcare-providers-register-with-ofsted/registration-requirements#voluntary-daycare

Health and Safety Executive. (2020). *Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974*. Accessed at https://www.hse.gov.uk/legislation/hswa.htm

Heseltine, P. (1982). Review of the Current State of Play. In B. Hughes (Ed.), *PlayEd 1982 – The Transcript Conference*. Ely.

Howard, J., & King, P. (2014). Re-establishing early years practitioners as play professionals. In J. Moyles (Ed.), *The excellence of play* (4th ed., pp. 125–137). Maidenhead: Open Universtiy Press.

Hughes, B. (1975). *Notes for Adventure Playworkers*. Children and Youth Action Group.

Hughes, B. (1996). *Play Environments: A Question of Quality*. PLAYLINK.

Hughes, B. (2002). A Playworker's Taxonomy of Play Types. 2nd ed. London: PlayLink.

Hughes, B. (2006). *Play Types Speculations and Possibilities*. London Centre for Playwork Education and Training.

Hughes, B., & Williams, H. (1982a, March, 8–9). Looking at Play – 1. *Play Times*.

Hughes, B., & Williams, H. (1982b, May, 16–19). Looking at Play – 2: A Biological Model. *Play Times*.

Hughes, B., & Williams, H. (1982c, July, 18–19). Looking at Play – 3: Some 'Whole' Environmental Effects. *Play Times*.

Hughes, B., & Williams, H. (1982d, September 10). Looking at Play – 4: The Price we Pay – The Distortion of Identity. *Play Times*.

Hughes, B., & Williams, H. (1982e, November, 22–23). Looking at Play – 5: From Analysis to Action. *Play Times*.

Johnson, C. (1990). *Sexism on the Adventure Playground: Making Sense of Practice*. Centre for Institutional Studies.

Joint National Committee on Training for Playwork. (1985). *Recommendations on Training for Playwork (the Salmon Book)*. The Joint National Committee on Training for Playwork.

Joint National Committee on Training for Playwork. (1997). *What's a Playworker Then?* The Joint National Committee on Training for Playwork.

Kilvington, J., & Wood A. (2018). Reflective Playwork for all who work with children 2nd Edition. London, Bloomsbury Academic.

King, F. (1988). Playwork – The Challenge Pt 2. In B. Hughes (Ed.), *PlayEd 1987–1988 Part 2 conference*. Ely.

King George's Jubilee Trust. (1955). *Citizens of to-Morrow: A Study of the Influences Affecting the Upbringing of Young People*. Odhams Press on Behalf of the Council of King George's Jubilee Trust.

King, P. (2020). Can Playwork Have a Key Working Role? *International Journal of Playwork Practice: 1*(1), Article 7. Accessed at https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1009&context=ijpp

King, P., & Newstead, S. (2019a). Childcare Worker's Understanding of the Play Cycle Theory: Can a Focus on "Process Not Product" Contribute to Quality Childcare Experiences? *Child Care in Practice*. Accessed at https://doi.org/10.1080/13575279.2019.1680532.

King, P., & Newstead, S. (2019b). Understanding the Adult Role in the Play Cycle—An Empirical Study. *Child Care in Practice*. https://doi.org/10.1080/13575279.2019.1575187

King, P. & Newstead. S. (2020). Demographic data and barriers to professionalisation in playwork, *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*. https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2020.1744694.

King, P., & Sturrock, G. (2019). *The Play Cycle: Theory, Research and Application*. Routledge.

King, P., & Waibel, A. (2016). Playwork Practitioners' Views on Play Provision in a South Wales Local Authority. *Journal of Playwork Practice, 3*(1), 35–48.

Lambert, J. (1974). *Adventure Playgrounds: A Personal Account of a Play-leader's Work, as Told to Jenny Pearson*. Penguin Books.

Legislation.gov.uk. (2020). *Planning (Scotland) Act 2019*. Accessed at https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2019/13/contents/enacted

Lester, S., & Russell, W. (2008). *Play for a Change – Play, Policy and Practice: A Review of Contemporary Perspectives, by the University of Gloucestershire*. National Children's Bureau.

Macintyre, I. (2007). Notes from a Playworker Who Wanted Children to Play his Game. In W. Russell, B. Handscomb, & J. Fitzpatrick (Eds.), *Playwork Voices: In Celebration of Bob Hughes and Gordon Sturrock*. London Centre for Playwork Education and Training.

Matsudaira, C. (2020). Play for Sick Children. In J. Cartmel & R. Worch (Eds.), *Playwork Practice at the Margins*. Routledge.

National Children's Play & Recreation Unit (NCPRU). (1991). *Accrediting Playwork(ers) – A Scheme for Accrediting the Competences of Play Workers*. NCPRU.

National Occupational Standards (NOS). (1992). *Assumptions and Values of Playwork*. National Occupational Standards of Playwork.

National Playing Fields Association (NPFA). (1960). *Adventure Playgrounds – A Progress Report*. National Playing Fields Association.

National Playing Fields Association (NPFA). (1984). *Towards a Safer Adventure Playground* (1st ed.. 1980 ed). National Playing Fields Association.

Newstead, S. (2004). *The Buskers Guide to Playwork*. Common Threads Publications Ltd.

Newstead, S. (2019). Le playwork à la recherche d'une identité perdue. *Sciences du Jeu*. Accessed at https://journals.openedition.org/sdj/2337

Nicholson, S. (1971). How Not to Cheat Children – The Theory of Loose Parts. *Landscape Architecture, 62*, 30–35.

Office for First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). (2008). Play and leisure statement for Northern Ireland. from http://www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk/index/equality/children-young-people/play-and-leisure-policy.htm

Office for First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). (2010). *Play and Leisure in Northern Ireland – Your Right to Play.* Retrieved from http://www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk/info_paper_chns_version_june_2009_final__2_.doc

Office for First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). (2011). *Play and Leisure Implementation Plan*. Retrieved from http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/play_and_leisure_implementation_plan.pdf

O'Grady, S. (1986). Playwork from a Community Development Perspective. In B. Hughes (Ed.), *PlayEducation The Priorities – Issues in Context II*. Ely.

Play England. (2009). *Charter for Children's Play*. National Children's Bureau.

PlayEducation. (1983). PlayEd 1983 – Play and Playwork: Developments and Definitions. In B. Hughes (Ed.), *PlayEducation*. Ely.

Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group (PPSG). (2005). *The Playwork Principles*. Retrieved from http://playwales.org.uk/login/uploaded/documents/Playwork%20Principles/playwork%20principles.pdf

Russell, W. (2005). Slices of History from the JNCTP Fruit Cake from Childhood (1990) to Adolescence (2005). *Celebrating a Safe Space for Dialogue: The History and Future of Playwork Training. 30th Birthday Party Conference.* Birmingham Repertory Theatre, JNCTP. Joint National Committee on Training for Playwork.

Scottish Government (SG). (2013). *Play Strategy for Scotland: Our Vision*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government. Retrieved from http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0042/00425722.pdf

Shier, H. (1991). *In-Service Training and Professional Development in Playwork: An Investigative Study for the National Childrens Play and Recreation Unit*. NCPRU.

SkillsActive. (2006). *Children's views 2006: Children and young people's views on play and playworkers*. London: SkillsActive.

SkillsActive. (2010). *SkillsActive UK Play and Playwork Education and Skills Strategy 2011–2016*. SkillsActive.

Smith, H. H. (2010). *Children's Empowerment, Play and Informal Learning in Two after School Provisions*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Middlesex University.

Smith, F. & Barker, J. (2000). Contested Spaces: Children's Experiences of Out of School Care in England and Wales. Childhood. https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568200007003005.

Stobart, T. (2001). *Take Ten for Play Portfolio*. Furzeham Graphics.

Sturrock, G. & Else, P. (1998). 'The Colorado Paper' – The Playground as Therapeutic Space: Playwork as Healing. In P. Else & G. Sturrock (Ed.) (2005), *Therapeutic playwork reader one 1995–2000* (pp. 73–104). Common Threads Publications Ltd.

Sutton, L. (2014). Adventure Playgrounds and Environmental Modification: A beginner's Guide. *Journal of Playwork Practice, 1*, 211–217.

UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC). (2013, April 17). *General comment No. 17 on the Right of the Child to Rest, Leisure, Pay, Recreational Activities, Cultural Life and the Arts* (art. 31). CRC/C/GC/17.

UN General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of the Child. (1989, November 20). *United Nations, Treaty Series,* 1577, p. 3.

van Rooijen, M. (2020). Developing a Playwork Perspective from Dutch Research Experience. In P. King & S. Newstead (Eds.), *Further Perspectives on Researching Play from a Playwork Perspective: Process, Playfulness, Rights-Based and Critical Reflection* (pp. 58–78). Routledge.

van Rooijen, M., & Newstead, S. (2017). Influencing Factors on Professional Attitudes Towards Risk-Taking in Children's Play: A Narrative Review. *Early Child Development and Care, 187*(5–6), 946–957.

Voce, A. (2015). *Policy for Play: Responding to children's Forgotten Right*. Policy Press.

Walters, M. (2008). Thinking About Creating a Play Environment. In F. Brown & C. Taylor (Eds.), *Foundations of Playwork* (pp. 113–118). Open University Press (McGraw-Hill).

Welsh Assembly. (2016). *National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare for Children up to the Age of 12 Years*. Accessed at https://careinspectorate.wales/sites/default/files/2018-01/160411regchildcareen.pdf

Welsh Assembly Government (WAG). (2002). *A Play Policy for Wales*. Cardiff: National Assembly for Wales.

Welsh Assembly Government (WAG). (2006). *Play Policy Implementation Plan*. Cardiff: National Assembly for Wales.

Welsh Government (2010). *Children and Families (Wales) Measure*. Cardiff: National Assembly for Wales. Accessed at http://www.legislation.gov.uk/mwa/2010/1/contents

Welsh Government. (2014). *Wales – A Play Friendly Country Statutory Guidance*. Accessed at https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-07/wales-a-play-friendly-country.pdf

Welsh Government. (2015). *Play Sufficiency Assessment Toolkit: PART ONE How to use the Play Sufficiency Toolkit and prepare for the Assessment*. Accessed at https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-07/play-sufficiency-toolkit-part-1-guidance-for-local-authorities.pdf

Williams, H. (1986). *Playworks*. PlayEducation.

Willans, B. (2020). Using playwork perspectives and ethnographic research to move towards an understanding of autistic play culture. In P. King & S. Newstead (Eds.) *Further Perspectives on Researching Play from a Playwork Perspective* (pp. 30–37). London: Routledge.

Woodall, J., & Kinsella, K. (2017). Playwork in Prison as a Mechanism to Support Family Health and Well-Being. *Health Education Journal, 76*(7), 842–852.