



England Wales Northern Ireland

Issue 13: June 2011

Newsbrief

International Play Association EWN
Promoting the Child's Right to Play

Future Themes

Welcome to Newsbrief; we hope you find it useful and informative. As well as news from members, there are important opportunities to contribute to events and the work of IPA.

We focus this brief edition on **Communications and Networking** for EWN

The final Newsbrief this year will be 12 October – **Playing into the Future**. This will include reports from the World Conference

If you have any short (400-500) articles or longer papers (1,000 words) on this theme, please send them to the Communications Group c/o info.ludemos@virgin.net by 12 October.

As you will see, there are other sections in the magazine, so please feel free to send in any relevant material.

Editorial statement

IPA EWN aims to inform, invigorate, critique and enhance research, policy and practice relating to play, environments for play and playwork

The views expressed in articles in Newsbrief and the IPA EWN website are those of the author and may not reflect the policy of IPA EWN, nor should publication be taken or assumed as an endorsement by IPA EWN of those views.

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There is no purpose to the child's life other than the pleasure of living it. It is not the child, in other words, who believes in something called development.

Adam Philips (1998)

For your information the current Executive Committee members (2011-12) are as follows:

Mike Greenaway – Chair; Blanche Thompson – Treasurer; Paul Soames – Secretary; Bob Hughes – Membership Secretary; Felicity Sylvester; Gill Evans; Keith Cranwell; Paul Hocker; Perry Else; Karen Wilkinson; Pete Darlington

Our IPA EWNI Statement for Play and Playwork was updated and added to.

The IPA has been in existence for fifty years, promoting children's right to play.

However, in that period, views of childhood, play and what is meant by appropriate provision for play, have changed fundamentally. Committee Members of IPA EWNI felt that greater clarity on the purpose of our organisation was needed to avoid us becoming 'all things to all people' in play. For example some of us in EWNI had contributed to the Playwork Principles (2005), which aimed to set a 'professional and ethical framework for playwork', including the desire to put the play process before all other agendas. Other members of IPA see play as learning, or as a means to health, or about community cohesion. We wanted to start a debate on these matters, hence this paper.

Comments welcomed!

News from AGM

A hectic but useful AGM was held in the middle of the launch of the Centre for Play and Leisure at Greenwich University on 12th May 2011. Our best turnout in recent years, no doubt attracted by the free entry to Greenwich University's event – or by the prospect of reading the annual accounts for the year – bottom line we have over £4,300 going into next year.

Thanks to Sheryl Clark and everyone at Greenwich for making us feel welcome.

Some items in this Newsbrief were agreed at the AGM.

IPA EWNI Statement for Play and Playwork

Article 31 of the UNCRC states that:

1. State 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. State Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic recreational and leisure activities.

It is therefore necessary for IPA EWNI to be clear about the benefits of play and how adults should provide for play.

What is play?

In 1984, playworkers in the UK adopted a definition for play that included the components of free choice, personal direction and intrinsic motivation – that children engaged in play for own reasons and not for any external goal or reward. This definition was developed from the literature of the day, and was felt to encapsulate what playworkers agreed reflected play's observed natural state in children and other playing species. It also implied the values that playworkers applied to their work with children, which were later encapsulated in the Playwork Principles (2005).

Along with these parameters, play was also generally agreed to be:

- a nomadic, spontaneous, first-hand, often fantasy experience
- whose behaviour is often exaggerated, and
- whose content and intent is controlled by the child

Why is play important?

Behaviour that reflects these characteristics is important because of the increasingly convincing evidence linking it to a range of advantages – bio-evolutionary and others – afforded to the child.

For example:

- **brain plasticity/growth** Byers, 1998
- **neural organisation** Brown, 1998; Sutton-Smith, 2007
- **cortical maps and consciousness** Damasio, 2000; Brown, 1998
- **muscular growth** Byers, 1998
- **good physical and mental health** Harlow, 1971; Brown, 1998; Sutton-Smith 1997; Stevens and Price, 2000
- **resilience and optimism** Masten, 2001; Rutter, 2006; Lester and Russell, 2008
- **flexible problem solving** Bruner, 1972; Sylva; 1976; Konner, 2010
- **ecological immersion and spatial navigation** Orr, 2002
- **the development of adaptive strategies** Burghardt, 2005
- **'rolling with the punches' of life** Sivi, 1998
- **maintaining good relationships** Pellis, 1998

IPA EWNI feel that neither these outcomes, nor the specific view of play, as free ranging, neophilic repertoires controlled by children themselves, evidentially linked to them, are given the importance for children that they reflect. Consequently play, playwork and provision for play seem undervalued, perhaps even undermined by some of the professionals who advocate for it.

Playwork

IPA EWNI believe that this definition of play, and the outcomes allied to that definition also imply important practical parameters for working with children at play, several of which may provide difficult hierarchical, political, social and cultural challenges for the adult community.

Therefore:

To play (and thus to benefit from play's outcomes) children need to be able to:

- immerse themselves unhindered by danger, interruption or unnecessary intervention, in a diverse, quirky, neophilic, private, elemental, natural, malleable, optimum-sized space,
- operate with a free, self-reliant, spontaneous, curious mindset, and
- be close to other children, other species, and
- have access to knowledgeable and professional adults

The principle is to uphold Article 31 of the UNCRC by supporting play and the conditions where play can take place.

Rationale for the changes and additions

The IPA has been in existence for fifty years, promoting children's right to play.

However, in that period, views of childhood, play and what is meant by appropriate provision for play, have changed fundamentally. IPA was aware of these developments and commissioned work to bring the organisation's thinking 'up-to-speed'. At the same time developments in playwork itself have resulted in several other texts, including the Playwork Principles (2005).

Lester and Russell ground their report (2010) in the well-argued belief that play is fundamental to the health and well-being of children; however it challenges the conception of childhood as 'a rehearsal for adulthood, and those opinions that describe play as a 'mechanism for development, and a 'way of developing the skills needed for adult life'.

Instead it prefaces what it sees as play's likely longer-term reasons for being, with 'play-centric' deductive statements that interpret play as an immediate and 'valuable' experience for the child. Namely:

- Play is about creating a world in which, for that moment, children are in control
- It is primarily behaviour for its own sake, for the pleasure and joy of being able to do it
- Play offers opportunities to move beyond existing ways of being, to transform structures and cross borders

Along with other critical contemporary texts it also supports the accepted currency of play, i.e. that play is intrinsically involved in the creation, organisation and mapping of the childhood brain. For example:

It is reasonable to think that the allocation of brain development between pre- and post-natal phases is related to the prevalence of play... (Burghardt, 2005: 511)

Play is turned on when there is an opportunity for experience dependent modification of the [brain] and turned off shortly after the architecture of the [brain] is complete. (Burghardt, 2005: 214)

However, IPA (World)'s own analysis is derived less from these contemporary bio-evolutionary views of play, and more from a conservative socio-political view of childhood and play. For example, IPA's Proposals for Action are couched in terms of the Government Departments that impact of children's lives (health, education, welfare, leisure and planning) and are functionally and politically biased (leaning towards adult agendas of sanitation, social development, attainment and cooperation, rather than being focused on the needs of the benefits to children of playing).

In IPA's view of children's rights, for example – and to some extent this view is shared by Lester and Russell too – play is subsumed into other rights, rather than being a facilitator of them as expressed in Hughes (Tokyo 1991).

It is IPA EWN's view that neither play, nor those practices developed to facilitate play (playwork) are given sufficient weight as born out in the current literature.

We feel that a statement for play and playwork should be less about adult's aspirational political agendas that seek to acculturate play, and more about what we feel is essential to support children's play so that they are able to experience regular, quality, authentic play that will enable them to face a changing, unpredictable and demanding future with the skills and bio-evolutionary advantages that nature has selected.

IPA EWN May 2011

Shout for EWNI!!

We want to shout about EWNI at the IPA World Conference in July and show delegates who we are.

To do this we need your help!

We want to display information on our members at the EWNI stall. To help we need –

- Copies of your logo (3 if possible on an A4 sheet)

- Leaflets on projects / your organisation (to be part of a collage)

- Promotional items with your logo on (we are having a fun quiz and need prizes)

If you are willing to shout EWNI – let me know for Friday 10th June 2011.

Contact details:

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IPA EWNI – Work Programme 2011-12 (DRAFT)

In line with our overall aims (see above) these are the tasks the Committee plan to take on this year. These will be finalised in September 2011 after the World Conference.

Purpose

Debating in all relevant national and international areas, the philosophical and practical rationales for intervening in children's play and the appropriateness and effectiveness of the various responses that have arisen from them

Advising and supporting the IPA International Board to effectively work to influence international bodies and agencies

Facilitating the international exchange of evidence and experience

Contributing to global consultation initiatives

Facilitating 'cross-fertilisation' between disciplines that have an interest or impact on children and young people's play, environments for play and playwork

Setting up working groups as necessary to support activities in line with our aims

Operating efficiently and using resources wisely

Activities (what we do)

Focus on UNCRC Articles 12 and 31

Support IPA International Board

Support IPA Playrights group

Support IPA Training Group

Communications Strategy

(for instance events, articles, papers, contribution to PlayRights magazine, website and supporting study visits)

Present an annual overview of the current play issues around the world – ideally through the magazine and website

Identify key themes for Newsbrief;

- Communications and Networking
- Playing into the Future
- ??

Support an IPA EWNI Conference in 2012 –

- Theme to be agreed
- Date to be agreed

Better links to IPA World

- Policy Areas

Clarify identity and promote consistently worldwide and in all communications

Communications Working Group to continue working

Encourage both individuals and organisations concerned with play to join IPA by providing a clear package of benefits.

Dragons and big cats appear in parks in Waltham Forest

New Natural Play Area created by London Play at Lloyd and Aveling Parks

London Play has been working with the Friends of Lloyd and Aveling Parks and Waltham Forest Council to build a new natural play area at Aveling Park. Funding came from Natural England and a grant to the Friends of the Park from Waltham Forest Community Council. A number of Scots pine trees were cut down as part of the regeneration of the park, and these were reused and repositioned with the help of Ruskins Trees and Landscapes Ltd. The trees were chosen and placed both for their suitability for children to climb on, and to be used as seats. Already they are a great success with local parents and children. Friedel Buecking, a chainsaw sculptor has carved many of the pieces of wood, one is now a giant dragon and another is a big cat.



One of the objectives of the Natural Play project is to allow play all over a public space, so this project extends the space for play in the park by providing an alternative play area to existing ones. London Play has also assisted park staff to maintain the structures and inspect them for safety, and to ensure that they are knowledgeable about the procedure of risk-benefit assessment which is replacing risk assessments in line with the Play England publication, [Managing Risk in Play Provision Implementation Guide](#).

Be part of IPA EWNI

Join IPA EWNI

If you would like to join IPA EWNI, an organisation devoted to promoting and protecting the child's right to play please visit: <http://www.ipa-ewni.org.uk> see 'Membership' and download an application pack.

Keeping in touch

Have we got your current contact details? If not please contact Bob Hughes, Membership Secretary: playeducation@ntlworld.com

Contribute

If you are an IPA EWNI member and would like to contribute to future issues of this Newsbrief please contact the acting editor, Perry Else: info.ludemos@virgin.net

IPA EWNI is a Registered Charity in England No. 1094980

We are part of IPA World:
<http://ipaworld.org>



PS Get hold of the PlayRights 50th Birthday special, it's fab!

Be impressed by the knowledge, passion and scope of the work of our organisation.

Let's talk... and play... and

Playstock is a fringe event that is being held at the Cardiff Arts Institute from 9.30 am on Tuesday 5th July. The event has been organised in response to demand from the playwork field for a free alternative to the IPA conference that is running through this week. Playstock will feature a presentation from Gordon Sturrock in the morning, and the opportunity for those who attend to participate in a number of themed discussions throughout the day.

Why Playstock?

When, in February of this year, I realised that I wasn't going to be able to attend the International Play Association conference in Cardiff (IPA), that I didn't have the funds to get there, I felt deeply disappointed. I had been in this space before – in 2008 when the Possible Futures World Cafe event, scheduled for a similar time of year in that year, was cancelled due to a lack of up-take from the playwork field. As it turned out, that news triggered a very creative period for me; I was desperate to keep the concept of a 'possible future' alive – as much in my own mind as anywhere else.

I suspect that there are many playworkers out there like myself, that would like to be at the international conference – to celebrate bringing such an event to the UK – but are limited in funds. We are in a time when the future of playwork – in certain forms at least – is deeply uncertain. It is, I feel, essential at this time that we as individuals are able to gather together to talk about the challenges that we face now and in the years to come, and how we might meet them with the dignity of an appropriate response.

Around the time I was trying to find the funds for IPA, I was having a number of conversations with my friend Arthur Battram about the concept of an 'edgeland' – specifically, a space that exists in the zone between an urban conurbation and the open countryside; the kind of place that houses sewage processing plants and refuse tips, brown field space, power stations and canal networks. I had found spaces like these attractive as a child and had sought them out. As an adult, the metaphoric resonance was no less powerful.

We felt that IPA need a sister conference, smaller, more fleeting, and out in the edgelands. A space where we could enter into the messiness that playwork eternally struggles to find its voice within, where we could get the stuff in our heads out into a mutually conceived zone and listen to what others voices had to contribute to this process; where we could provoke each other into offering challenging, daring and perhaps occasionally beautiful glimpses of what we might be and become as adults of the playspace.

It is our hope that this event will contribute to enriching the IPA from the fringe, and will encourage all those that would like to participate to come along and take part.

Just turn up, tune in, and play out.

Eddie Nuttall – Playworker and writer



