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Y Dirprwy Weinidog dros Blant
Deputy Minister for Children



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

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Helen-Mary Jones AM,
Chair, Children & Young People Committee,
The National Assembly for Wales,
Cardiff Bay,
Cardiff,
CF99 1NA

28 June 2010

Dear Helen Mary

Thank you for inviting me to attend the recent Children and Young People Committee meeting, to give further evidence for the Inquiry into Safe Places to Play and Hang Out.

I had mentioned in previous evidence that the Welsh Assembly Government had commissioned consultations into children and young people's ideas about play, their hopes and expectations of play opportunities, and some barriers they experienced to their playing.

The research and report into play for children aged 3, 4 and 5 was conducted by Dynamix and that for children and young people aged 5 – 14 years of age was conducted by Funky Dragon.

I am attaching copies of both these reports and hope that they will form a positive contribution to this Inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

Huw Lewis AM/AC

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Wedi'i argraffu ar bapur wedi'i ailgylchu (100%)

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'What is Play?'

A Consultation with Children under the age of 5 March 2010

On Behalf Of

The Child and Family Branch
Department of Children
Education, Lifelong learning and
Skills (DCELLS)
Welsh Assembly Government



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Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government



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1. Background and Aims

1.1 The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to the promotion of children's play and has taken more and earlier initiatives in this field than other home administrations. The Assembly Government's Play Policy sets out its recognition of the vital importance of play, and commitment that society should seek every opportunity to support it and create an environment that fosters it. '*The Play Policy Implementation Plan*', published in February 2006, sets out how the principles set out in the play policy will be implemented. It was founded on the aims and priorities outlined in the Assembly Government's strategic plan '*Better Wales*', and the policy statement '*Children and Young People: Rights to Action*'.

1.2 In delivering their commitment to promote play, the Welsh Assembly Government will develop guidance and standards for Local Authorities to deliver quality play opportunities.

1.3 This consultation gathered the views of children under 5 across Wales on their understanding of play to inform a definition of play. This will enable work to be taken forward for the development of standards and guidance on play for local authorities.

1.4 The consultants worked from an understanding of play as being 'intrinsically motivated, personally directed and freely chosen', in keeping with the Wales Play Policy.

2. Who was Involved?

2.1 The Consultants

Dynamix is a Welsh social enterprise that provides consultation services, training and facilitation. It has built up a strong reputation in this area through its 20 year history.

Dynamix specialises in working with children and young people. Dynamix consults using participative and fun activities to engage inclusively, with a particular strength in consulting those seldom consulted. Dynamix were contracted to carry out this consultation on behalf

of The Child and Family Branch of the Department of Children, Education, Lifelong learning and Skills (DCELLS) of the Welsh Assembly Government.

2.2 The Settings

6 settings were approached and asked to be involved in the consultation. 2 children's centres and 4 schools from across Wales, representing a range of geographical areas, ethnic backgrounds, ability within the age group of under 5's, out of which 3, 4 and 5 year olds were consulted.

Caia Park Nursery, Wrexham

Caia Park is a free standing nursery in a socially deprived area. Caia Park Nursery is a resourced provision providing assessment places for children with identified learning needs, 7 children have assessment places. 14 girls and 15 boys were consulted. 1 child was Muslim/ Christian, the others either Christian or no religion specified. 1 African, 24 White Welsh, 1 White Polish, 1 another White background, 1 dual heritage White and Black African and 1 another dual heritage background.

Swansea Integrated Children's Centre, Penlan, Swansea

Penlan is a socially deprived area. The Children's Centre provides a range of activities for children of all ages. An open access after school play session for children aged 4 to 10 years was observed for the purpose of this consultation. Consultants identified which children were under the age of 5 and focused their research on them. The children observed were White Welsh.

Ysgol Glannau Gwaun, Fishguard

The reception class was observed in this bilingual Primary School. 13 girls and 15 boys were consulted. All children were White Welsh apart from 1 who was from another white background.

Llwynhendy Children's Centre, Llwynhendy

An open access play session for 4 to 6 year olds was observed. Due to the nature of the setting it was impossible to ensure that all children observed were under the age of 5 but

the opportunity to work in an entirely play focussed session was too valuable not to take up. Llwynhendy is a socially deprived area. All the children observed were believed to be White Welsh. 1 child had additional learning needs. Due to the session being open access more detailed information was not available.

Mount Street Infant School, Brecon

The nursery class was observed. 10 girls and 15 boys. 1 Buddhist, 4 Hindu, 5 Christian, 6 no religion and 9 not specified. 7 Nepali, 17 white British. 1 dual heritage White and Asian.

Terrace Road Primary School, Swansea

This school is in a socially deprived area, the nursery class was observed. 12 girls, 17 boys, 4 Christian, 3 Muslim, 22 no religion. 1 Bangladeshi, 22 White Welsh, 4 another White background, 1 dual heritage White and Black African, 1 another dual heritage.

3. Methods and Approach

Due to the age range of participants the consultations were approached with extreme flexibility. Dynamix consultants prepared the following range of simple, age appropriate methods:

- Puppets – Child like and animal puppets were taken to each consultation. These were used directly to engage with the children. Consultants introduced the puppet and asked the children to tell them or show them the best things to play with and to show them what they could play with in the setting. The puppets were also frequently adopted by the children and became part of the play.
- Magic Wand – Consultants asked children what they would wish for to play with if they had a magic wand.
- Drawing – Children were asked to draw the places they played and describe them.

In addition to these methods, consultants observed children at play, asked them about what they were doing and responded to play cues. The majority of the information was gathered by observation as the children consulted were immersed in their play and over use of the above methods would have compromised their play.

4. Findings

The consultants approached the process with a blank sheet of paper. To ensure that the understanding of play gathered was entirely based on what the children demonstrated or talked about, pre-existing play categories were not used. The findings have been split in to the following themed areas. These areas were the most consistently observed and reported across the settings.

The key issues are the elements that were noticed to mainly support or hinder the type of play that were particularly significant to the children consulted.

4.1 Other Children

Children spark play in each other. Whilst solo play can be focused and engrossing, play with others is challenging, diverse and constantly evolving. Consultants observed groups of children descending on particular play items. With a slide as a focus, children were observed setting themselves increasingly greater challenges:

“I'm going to go down backwards”

“I can go on my face”



The children responded to each other's new use of the slide by finding another new way of sliding, then climbing over the fence to access it, then adding forward rolls and jumps on to other equipment at the end. The slide play was then reflected on in recall at the end of the session:

“It hurt my head when I went down backwards”
“On Monday I am going to go down the slide faster”

The sliding had taken place at the very start of the session so this exchange demonstrated that it was of particular significance to the children and the experience was enabling them to anticipate and plan for future play. This process of increasing the level of challenge and diverse use was less observed in solo play.

Children were observed greeting each other with cuddles. One small boy started to get a bit more boisterous than the other children involved, a girl shouted, “Cut that out” at him. The boy responded with laughter, the exchange repeated, becoming more exaggerated and turned into a game.

A girl playing solo and focused with small sheep was interrupted by a boy with a toy tiger, her gentler game dramatically changed and the tiger chased the sheep around the nursery.

Children directly request play guidance and stimuli from each other. This exchange began with one boy asking another, “What shall we play?” The second boy responded with, “We're playing a house game, you are a dog”. The first boy then began sawing with a plastic saw. The second boy took the saw off him and said, “Dog's don't do that, come on dog”. The 'dog' obediently gave up the saw and followed the boy barking and on all fours.

Other examples of children setting rules for each other's play were noted. In a play house a girl directed the other children on how to tuck up their babies in the buggies or carriers and then led a procession of children and baby dolls around the yard.

A child was observed sharing cars out between himself and another child, “You have that one, I'll have this one”. The other child did not take part in the car distribution but accepted the allocation and played apparently contentedly.

In all of these exchanges and in similar exchanges, children accepted the temporarily

elevated status and director role of other children. These roles were fluid with different children occupying them at different times.

A boy wearing a black cloak identified himself as Batman and blended his solo play with others by moving through the nursery asking, "Does anyone need any help?". He remained firmly in his role whilst assisting other children to gather toys and put on dressing-up clothes that facilitated their separate play.

Children frequently described other children including siblings and friends in their 'magic wand' and drawn responses.

Key Issues

- Having other children to play with or play near is vital
- The sparks that move play on between children could easily be misinterpreted by adults and seen as unacceptable, for example, shouting, interrupting gentler play, one child being too directive
- Fluidity of movement between areas is important. Restrictions to who can play where and when can hinder the fast moving dynamics of this kind of play or even make some children unwilling to move on at all

4.2 Loose Parts

Objects that children can use for many different purposes were observed to be integral to much of the play observed. Some loose parts were clearly intended for such play, for example every setting had sand, gravel or water and large blocks or crates.

One child was observed using his arm as a digger, making mechanical sounds and moving it in a robotic way. He spent the majority of the play session building, knocking down and rebuilding the sand into different arrangements. This kind of play was observed frequently, often with children becoming very engrossed in the process.

Large wooden blocks were used to build structures and change the environment; children told us that they were rivers to jump over or mountains to climb. Crates supported other play by becoming steps, seats, vehicles. One setting had sit on diggers and large sand and gravel pits that scaled up the sand play.



Other items used for diverse purposes included craft paper, intended for making crowns, being rolled up to make telescopes, a drill being used as a gun and a fish stirring a cup of tea.

Adults and other children both became loose parts at times in the play observed. Children were put in barrels and rolled around the space and adults used to provide strength to move large items around.

Children described a wide range of toys and objects as part of their play and told us about adults who enhanced their play by becoming part of it. A boy described an uncle who moved boxes at his direction to build a fort for him.

This play sequence clearly illustrates the changing use of one item:

A toy petrol pump was used as a fireman's hose putting out fires, accompanied by splashing noises. A child approached in role as a dinosaur and the child with the hose said, "I've got a gun". The petrol pump immediately became a gun to defend him from the dinosaur, with appropriate sound effects. After a few moments of shooting, the dinosaur announced that he was a baby dinosaur. The gun transformed into a baby bottle and the original fireman fed the baby dinosaur with the hose from the petrol pump. Each transformation was instant and unquestioned by the children. Later, when the group went into the hall to play on bikes and cars, two girls carefully carried the petrol pump out into the hall and most of the children visited it to fill up their cars.

Key Issues

- Prescribing specific purposes to specific items should be avoided, some of the richest play comes from creative and unexpected uses of items
- Play equipment that allows many different uses should be provided and an atmosphere that promotes alternatives to be encouraged
- Play equipment should be moveable between areas

4.3 Physical Environment

The children consulted used their physical environments in a variety of ways to play. Specific items such as the slide described above, spinning tops and balance beams provided a straight forward focus. Most of the children spent some time on this fixed equipment often repeating actions until they had mastered them.



One setting had a low snaking wall through part of the yard area. This stimulated a great deal of play. Children ran around it, chasing, escaping and searching, they jumped or climbed over it and sat on or placed things on it. It provided opportunities to hide and meant that short laps of the yard became longer and more varied.

Play benefited greatly when children were able to move large parts of the environment, around such as crates or blocks and have fluidity of movement between sections. Where free access to outside play was available play became richer as narratives could include travel, visiting, exploring and other changes. Children told us about these complex stories.

Inside, varieties in the space, such as low platforms and steps, also supported play. Inside and outside, areas of different sizes, textures and shapes enhanced the play experience.

Children were able to explore, hide and play unobserved by staff.

Some of the settings had specific muddy areas; these were usually segregated as staff reported that both children and parents continue to express concerns about getting dirty when using them.



The provision of unusual substances to play with, for example ice in water play or slime with little figures in it, allowed the children to explore senses through their play. They licked the ice and listened to it crack, and ran the slime through their fingers.

Being able to run around and play boisterously is a vital part of play for this age group. Children whose permission or ability to do this was restricted appeared frustrated and disengaged. Children told us that they like to run as part of their play and described outside spaces as good places to play.

Key Issues

- Play space and equipment should be diverse and interesting
- Permission and ability to move fluidly between areas is important
- Play settings should have space and promote permission to run, be boisterous and noisy

4.4 Mastery Play / Specific Learning

It is important to differentiate between play where specific learning occurs and playful learning activities. Many staff were clearly very skilled at creating engaging and playful

activities as learning tools which often stimulated later play. However this consultation focuses on play that is by its nature chosen and directed by children.

During this consultation children were observed focussing on and repeating an action until they had increased their ability to do it. For example:

- A boy repeatedly attempting to throw a basketball through a hoop.
- A boy working out how to use a two wheeled scooter.
- A child making a concentrated effort to get a specific box of cars from a pile of boxes.
- Two girls working out how to complete a pattern on a threading card.
- A child working out which crates he needed to put together to make a step the right size to reach a blackboard to draw on.

This play clearly had the secondary outcome of learning but it is important that play doesn't get hijacked by an adult agenda of learning and teaching and that adults don't step in too quickly or uninvited and interrupt this kind of play.

Key Issues

- Ensure that play is valued for it's own sake
- Support adults to stand back even if children appear to be struggling with a task
- Let the environment and equipment be challenging

4.5 Adults

During this consultation the effect of adults on play, both to support and hinder it was observed. Children at times used the adults, both staff and the consultants as part of their play. For example:

- One group of girls spent some time running little plastic horses over the heads of two consultants and then pretended the horses were on their heads when they weren't.
- Another popular game was putting items in a consultant's hat and telling him to put

it on, great hilarity followed when the items fell out on his head. This was repeated several times.

Children were observed playing at being dogs. At their request, the play worker threw a stick repeatedly for them to fetch. One child with very limited speech invited a consultant to play with a raised hand and led them through the outside area demonstrating uses of various equipment. He started to balance around a plastic ring and stumbled slightly. The consultant responded with, "Oops a daisy!" and the child laughed. He then repeatedly, deliberately, stumbled to elicit another 'oops a daisy'; this was repeated for some time.

Other times, children expressed concern at adults becoming too immersed in their play and needed to check that consultants knew that a jumper was not really for sale or that a walkie talkie watch was 'pretend'. Children used masks and roaring to scare consultants but as they reacted in fear the children lifted the masks and said, "It's me really", again ensuring that adults understood the boundaries of play.

Children built their play challenges around the adults by attempting to build a pile of blocks until it was tall enough for them to stand on and 'be higher than you (the adult)' or by asking the consultants to tell the teacher to look for them as they hid. Adults were regularly put to practical use: opening things, reaching things, heavy lifting. However, at times the consultants were aware of adults creating barriers to play. For example:

- A boisterous shooting game was stopped as other children's parents had complained about it in the past.
- A boy was told to stop fiddling with the grille over the speaker of a radio at story time.

One teacher noticed that a group of children were unwilling to stop playing as they had invested a lot of time and energy in a lego structure. She negotiated and agreed to put it away until the next day so that no-one else could take it apart. The group were happy with this and moved on to the next structured activity smoothly; this appeared to be a positive solution to balancing the play needs and the school requirements. However, the same

teacher took three small plastic figures from a child and told her she should not be playing with them as it was time to move on to a structured activity. The teacher had not observed that the child had spent just as much time and energy developing her internal narrative with the small plastic figures as the group had with the lego. A similar response of putting them somewhere safe ready for the next play session would have demonstrated respect and valuing of the child's play.

Key Issues

- Adults in the play space must be aware of their influence
- Adults should wait to be invited in and allow the children to lead the play
- Notice and value all types of play, if it is important to the child then it is important
- Adults should be supported to recognise their role in advocating for and protecting children's right to play

4.6 Risk



The ability, permission and opportunity to take risks in play were perceived to be very important. Children reported and demonstrated a range of risk taking behaviours and a desire to play with fear and perceived danger.

Physical risks included crashing cars and bikes, crashing into walls, climbing and jumping off high frames, walls and wobbly stacks of blocks. These were often incrementally increased with children trying the boundaries.

Imaginative fear and risk were noticed in chasing and roaring games, a gang of children in fierce spider costumes roamed one yard looking for children to scare. One girl responded to this by putting down her baby doll and stating she would 'be a tiger'. She roared and chased off the spiders, then calmly returning to her doll game.

Some risk taking behaviour was observed when children engaged with the consultants. One child repeatedly asked the consultant to write down things like 'I like the toilet, I like my baby brother when he puts his head in the toilet and I flush it'. He then returned later asking the consultant to cross it out.

The puppets allowed children to play with fear: they approached them tentatively and then ran away when the puppets responded to them. One girl brought other children to see the puppet and repeated the process.

Key Issues

- Ensure adults understand that risk and fear are normal and healthy parts of play
- Ensure the environment has areas where children can play unobserved and that there are equipment or features that allow physical challenge and imaginative 'scares'
- Equipment should be robust and easy to replace so damage and breakages are not the end of the world

4.7 Solo Play

Solo play often provided a contrast to the rowdier play that happened with other children. Individuals became absorbed in play of varying complexity. This included watching a spinning spiral, circling on a bike and building train tracks.

- One child was observed to spend the entire free play session at the sand table lifting, digging, pouring the sand whilst talking quietly to himself, describing his actions. He was briefly interrupted by a boy in a fireman's helmet. Once that child had moved on, the boy stopped playing in the sand to sing the entire Fireman Sam

theme tune and then returned to his quiet sand play and chatter.

- Similarly, a girl spent the entire play session moving throughout the setting with three small plastic figures. First in the designated area and then lining them up on the arms of chairs, on book shelves and in the craft area.
- A child spent a length of time lying on the floor behind a low bookshelf hiding and a girl focussed on sawing at the leg of the teacher's chair, with a plastic saw stopping to gather more tools and continue her task.
- A boy sat poking his tongue through empty glasses frames and another sat in a plastic tray with a selection of small figures. A child tried on various dressing up items in front of a mirror.

All of these play opportunities required the space to be well divided, meaning that those engaging in solo play could do so relatively undisturbed. All of this play came from having unstructured time available in the diverse environment. It was also important that individual children were able to monopolise a piece of equipment for a period of time.

Key Issues

- Divide the play space well so that there is capacity for children to occupy their own area
- Allow equipment to not be shared sometimes
- Unstructured time allows this kind of play plenty of time to develop



4.8 Play With Structured Activities

Play is not just something that happens at play time. Various types of play were observed when children were apparently engaging in staff led activities.

- A little girl twirled a paint brush between hands whilst standing at the easel.
- A group of children were banging on the wall, rather than clapping during story time.
- The girl mentioned earlier incorporated three little dolls in everything she did until the teacher took them away from her.

Children became play things for each other, they were observed patting each other during circle time and pulling faces at each other at the end of snack.

One directed session of sorting toy animals into sea, farm or jungle creatures led to the following comments being made, demonstrating that a depth of play was happening within the activity:

“The gorillas are kissing”

“I like dancing”

“If you kill me, I will kill you”

“Baby lamb is lost and found”

“I thought someone was here, baby lamb is buried under the grass”

Solo play was also observed whilst structured activities were going on. A girl pulled threads from the carpet and threw them in the air watching them float to the ground and a boy held his glasses close and then further away from his face playing with the difference it made to what he could see.

One setting particularly encourages this type of play by ensuring that snack was a potential play experience. The children had grapes, cheese cubes and cereal hoops to thread on to straws before eating them. No rules were established by the adults about how this should be done resulting in play being observed.

Key Issues

- This kind of play can easily be devalued and disregarded or even actively resisted by adults
- Adults should be supported to understand that this is play
- Rules in a play setting should be flexible so they do not inhibit it
- Where structured activities are necessary they should be designed to be playful and flexible

5.Summary

The children involved in this consultation clearly demonstrated that there are two main areas that need to be considered to ensure that Local Authorities are able to provide quality play opportunities for the under fives. The attitudes and understanding of adults and the flexibility and diversity of play spaces.

This age group rarely play away from adults whether this is parents or professionals. Adults are the gate keepers of their play experiences. All adults from Local Authority decision makers to individual parents need to be educated and supported to appreciate and advocate for freely chosen, intrinsically motivated, personally directed play. Including the understanding that this can and should, at times, be messy, risky and anarchic. Play spaces need to be designed to support play that is free flowing, with opportunities for children to create the rules, uses and structure for themselves. Moveable equipment or items of many uses should be provided. Allowing the play space to become something different for each child, each time they play there.



Welsh Assembly Play Consultation



"Play is excellent because
you get some time on your
own and no one can tell
you what to do"

"Play is important
because you can
just be yourself"



Funky Dragon March 2010



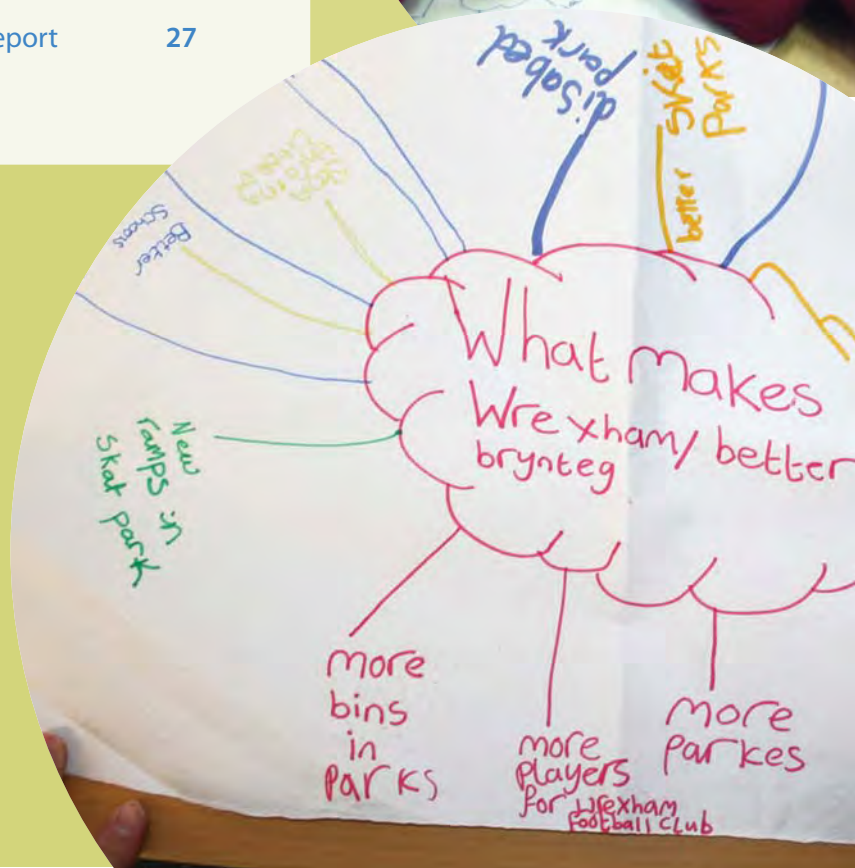
Cynulliad Plant a Phobl Ifanc yng Nghymru
The Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

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Introduction

It is now widely regarded that children are experts on their own lives. Numerous consultations and research programmes have highlighted children's abilities to give opinions and make real and valid contributions. With regards to play, traditional consultations and research have a 'tendency to focus on 'things' rather than 'experiences' and on the more obvious and superficially exciting elements of provision' (Playlink). It is also very difficult to think about play spaces outside your own realm of understanding and expectations. For example, asking children 'what equipment would you like in your local park' will attract limited responses based on what the individual knows about play equipment.

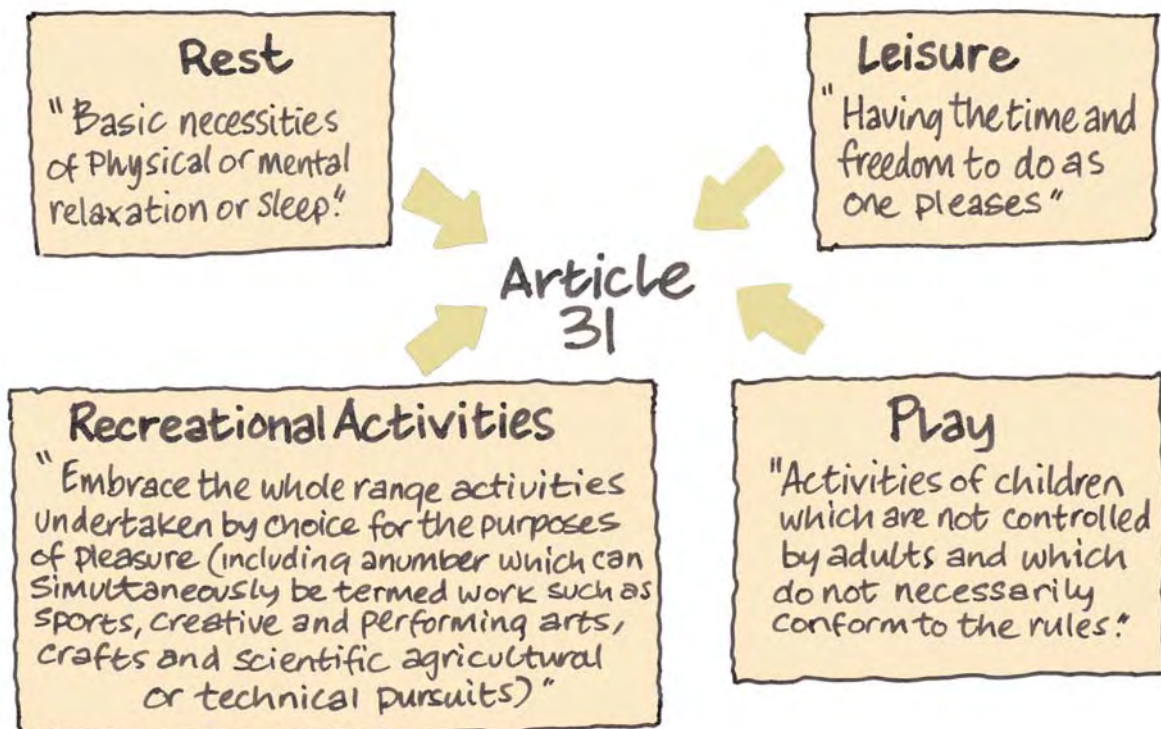
Understanding where and why children play and their motivations offer more insight into their needs. Playlink have highlighted 'Asking children direct questions about what they 'like best' or 'enjoy most' in a play space is not necessarily going to tell you what actually engaged them most. A better understanding of children's motivations and expectations needs to be known to provide a more comprehensive picture of what children need for play.

That is not to say that local facilities shouldn't be researched and understood. Indeed, these services need sustainable funding and considering where and how children think this would be best spent will enable these services to be of more benefit to children and make them more cost effective. However, an understanding of how children define play as well as what inspires them to play was addressed in this consultation. This theme of the consultation focuses on a more abstract sense of play, on issues such as access, experiences and expectations.

Workshop aims

The aims of the following workshops were to investigate children and young people's attitudes and feelings regarding play. These workshops have been devised for the 5-14 year old age groups and so have been divided into three workshops relating to children; those aged 5-7, 7-11 and 11-14. This is to accommodate for differences in attitudes towards 'play' (for example, older children prefer to think about recreation time as opposed to play). Given the diverse age range for this consultation 'play' has been interpreted in a more abstract sense and relates to the United Nations definitions relating to Article 31:





Implementation handbook for the Convention on the Rights of the Child: Unicef

Methodology

Key Questions

Based on previous research certain key questions were devised and made relevant for all age ranges in this consultation. This allowed for consistency during analysis, tracked differences in attitudes in age ranges and provide general attitudes towards play provision rather than area or person specific responses. The questions were devised based on previous research in the realm of play and attitudes to play plus requirements from the Welsh Assembly Government to provide local authority guidance. The following table outlines the key questions and discusses their relevance to this consultation.



Key Question	Relevance
What is play?	<p>The Welsh Assembly defines play as</p> <p><i>'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.'</i></p> <p>Asking children and young people this question will enable them to explore what play means to them and offer understanding to Practitioners on the aspects they would include in defining play themselves.</p>
Where do you play?	<p>Previous research has highlighted that most children enjoy playing in their local area i.e. parks, streets and communities. (playday 2006 and Why do people's ages go up not down?) It is included here to clarify these claims and set the agenda for subsequent questions.</p>
What do you play?	<p>As previously stated, previous research suggests spaces where children play but there is little indications of 'what' children do in these spaces. The aim of this question is to look at what activities children undertake.</p>
What stops you playing?	<p>The aim of this question is to identify the barriers to play. Provision for children will need to address issues that prohibits children's play.</p>
What is missing in the locality?	<p>Following on from the previous section this question is about identifying needs as well as identifying a process that would make them accessible to all. In addition to this, this question can also provide Practitioners with guidance straight from children as to what should be thought about when considering play provision.</p>

These key questions were developed to provide children with the scope to create their own definitions of play. It also offered scope for thinking about play in the locality and will unearth the wants and needs of children and young people in their localities.

Supporting Statistical Evidence

The following questions have been devised to provide purely statistical evidence which will work with other sections of the workshops. The questions are;

Key Question	Relevance
Would you rather play inside or outside?	Previous research indicates that children would rather play outside (WDPAGUND – 70%, Playday 2006 – 80%) However, both of these were undertaken during the summer and asking children during winter months will indicate how much emphasis children place on outdoor play.
Would you rather play with friends or alone?	Previous research indicates that friends are an important aspect of playing. It is included here for clarity for the next section.
Can you walk to meet your friends?	As previously stated, friends are an important aspect of playing. However, there is very little research that indicates if friends can be accessed easily and locally. This question will contribute to access issues in the previous sections.
Would you rather participate in adult led activities or choose your own activities?	This is an important question for local authorities to consider when devising their play strategies. This will contribute to the previous section relating to the evaluation of local facilities and will provide understanding of children’s needs for play.
Would you rather an adult present while playing or not?	If children say they prefer individual-led activities this does not necessarily mean that they would not like an adult present. This question will highlight if children feel more comfortable with an adult present and may link with previous safety concerns.



Workshops

The activities relating to each age range and each theme are outlined below. As previously stated, consistency across the age ranges regarding data collection has been addressed. Where differences arise relating to age group they have been noted in the table below.

Question	Activity Idea 5-7 yrs	Activity Idea 7-11 yrs	Activity Idea 11-14yrs
	Ice breaker – 5 minutes	Ice breaker – 5 minutes	Ice breaker – 5 minutes
What does play mean? 5 minutes	Discuss with the whole class about what play is and what they think it means. Write comments and ideas onto flipchart paper. If there is time ask for definitions of play in small groups	Discuss with the whole group what play is and what they think it means Divide the class into smaller groups and ask for definitions of play Feedback and discuss	Discuss with the whole group what play/free time is and what they think it means Divide the class into smaller groups and ask for definitions of play Feedback and discuss
Where do you play? What activities do you enjoy playing there? Who do you play with there? 10 minutes	Drawing sheet; Where do you play What do you play Who do you play with	Drawing sheet; Where do you play What do you play Who do you play with	Information sheet; Where do you spend your free time? What do you do in your free time Who do you spend your free time with?
What stops you from playing? 15 minutes	Peer research/interviews Ask for a group of volunteers from year 5 or 6 at the school Run a workshop with them to train them in interview/questioning skills Ask the older group to interview small groups of 5-7 year olds (about 4 or 5) about the questions identified around what stops them playing Transcribe and analyze	Ask the class to write down 3 things that they feel stops them playing To feedback play 'agree or disagree' – Ask for a volunteer to stand at the front and read out one of the issues they have written down The class then runs to the right or left side of the class to indicate if they agree or disagree	Ask the class to write down 3 things that they feel stops them playing To feedback play 'agree or disagree' – Ask for a volunteer to stand at the front and read out one of the issues they have written down The class then runs to the right or left side of the class to indicate if they agree or disagree
What is missing in your local area? 15 minutes	This issues this question raises will be included in the training of older children to research the views of their younger peers	Divide the class into smaller groups and think about what they think is missing locally Ask each group to feedback to the rest of the class In groups again ask for 'top tips' for Practitioners when considering play provision	Divide the class into smaller groups and think about what they think is missing locally Ask each group to feedback to the rest of the class In groups again ask for 'top tips' for Practitioners when considering play provision
	End Game – 5 minutes	End Game – 5 minutes	End Game – 5 minutes

In addition to the above workshop the following questions will be asked via dot voting in small groups with the younger age group and a confidential questionnaire with the older age groups;

Would you rather play inside or outside?

Would you rather play with friends or alone?

Can you walk to meet your friends?

Would you rather participate in adult led activities or choose your own activities?

Would you rather an adult present while playing or not?

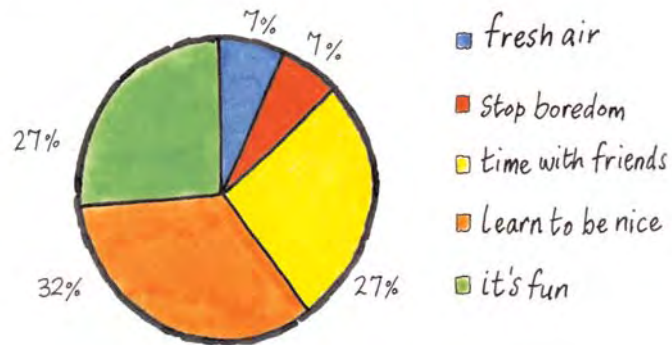


Results

As discussed in the methodology, the research was split into five research questions and a quantitative research method called 'dot voting'.

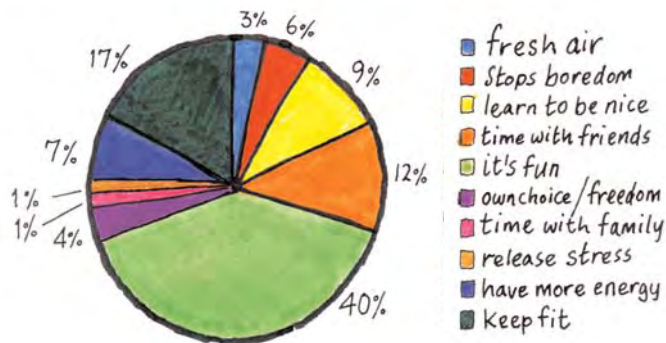
Why is play important? Total responses 377

5-7yrs Why is play important



Due to the small number asked for the 5 to 7 year olds it is difficult to generalise from these numbers; however it is interesting that most of the children thought that it was important to 'be nice' when playing. This may have come from being told by teachers and parents to share toys and not fight when playing with friends.

7-11yrs Why is play important ?



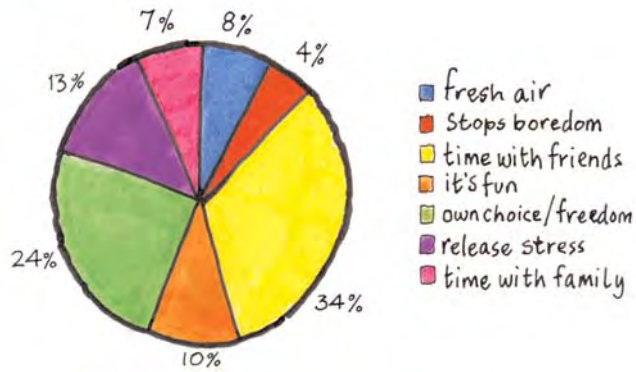
"Play is important because you can just be yourself" aged 9

"Play is fun because it is your time you can waste and do whatever you want with it, because you can play" aged 10

"It's important to keep healthy through play" aged 10

For the juniors age group, playing is important to them because it's fun. Although with the second largest percentage answering to keep fit, it does seem that the messages about running about to keep fit is getting through to them.

11-14 yrs Why is play important



By the time the children reach comprehensive school, they see free time as something to do with friends. Fun is rated lower down especially when comparing to the juniors age group. Having their own choice also becomes more important at this age group and something that is recognised as important to them.

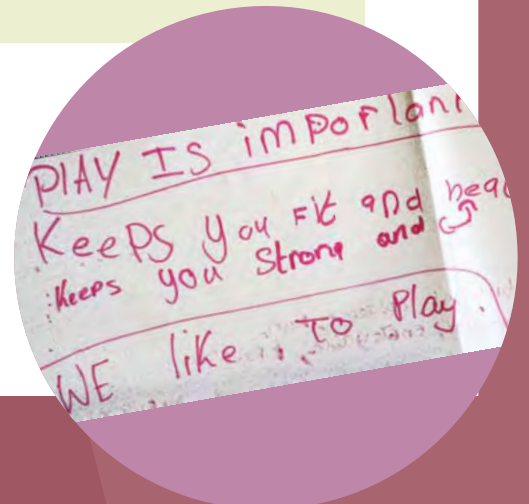
When the data is combined we see that fun is the biggest reason why children and young people think that play/free time is important. Time with friends is the second most popular reason given.

Summary

5 to 7 year olds say play is a time to learn to be nice.

7 to 11 year olds recognise play as fun but also as a way to keep fit and 9% say it's a time to learn to be nice.

11 to 14 year olds recognise that play is something that is freely chosen and time to spend with friends.



What do we think?

The Welsh Assembly says that play should be 'freely chosen', so why is it that 5 to 11 year olds do not know this as much as teenagers do? So much emphasis is put on play as a source of learning to be nice and as a way to keep fit that this dimension of play is lost. The UNCRC says that recreational activities should be 'undertaken by choice for the purpose of pleasure'. Although being nice is important, and keeping fit is a beneficial by-product of play it should remain just those – by-products. More attention should be given to children's understanding the meaning of play, that it should not be undertaken for any external gain or reward.

Consideration also needs to be given about structuring children's play. Society has moved on and it's no longer an option for many parents to tell their children to play outside and not know where they are for most of the day. It is now necessary for parents to organise play dates for their children with other parents, whether it is inviting children over to each other's houses or meeting up in play centres or parks. However, there needs to be a balance. Structuring all of their free time with clubs and a variety of other hobbies misses the point. Children and young people need time to relax and just 'hang out' and do nothing.

Where, what, who do you play?

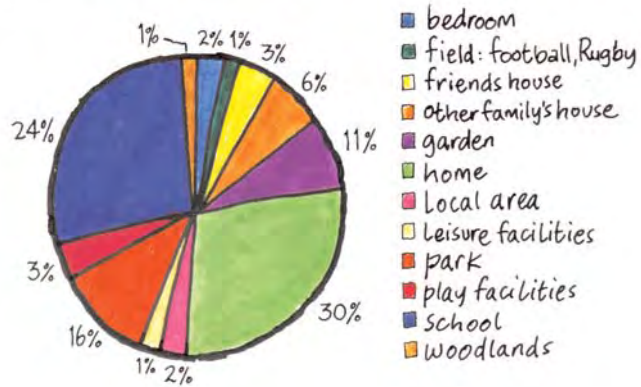
This question was split into three categories and have been analysed as such. Here are some examples of the answers given:

Where	What	Who	Age
In the trees behind Emily's house	Making a den	Friends	Junior
The moss valley	Who can throw the furthest piece of bread	People – family	Junior
Park	Football, rugby, chat and get something to eat	Friends	Comp
Field	Making a den with things we find	7 friends	Junior
Garden	Looking at flowers	My own	Infants

Where do you like to play? Total responses - 1143

The children were asked where do they like to play

Where - 5 to 7 years old



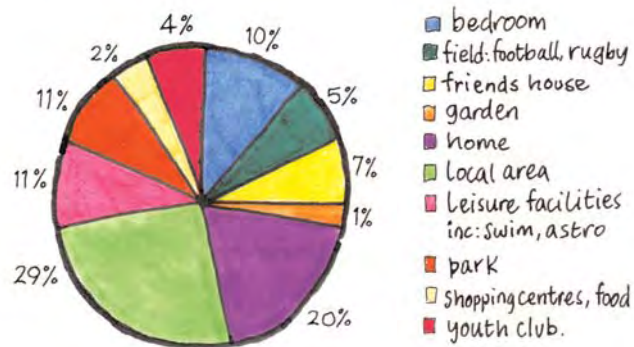
For this question, the 5 to 7 year olds top answer was home, with second being school, and park third. This is likely to be due to their age and home being the place where they spend most of their free time, not being allowed to go out to play outside alone yet. For school to be the second biggest answer also demonstrates that children can only give answers for what they know. The question did not ask where do you want to play, but where do you play. If the question was followed up by where do you want to play, it is doubtful that the results would have been very different.

Where - 7 to 11 years old



Home has gone down in popularity with the 7 to 11 age group, although it is still has the highest number of responses. Park is the second most popular answer with leisure facilities third. This demonstrates the growing freedom children have as they get older and are able to go further afield to play and spend their free time rather than staying indoors as much.

Where- 11 to 14 years old



The results from this graph demonstrate further the way that young people are given more freedom the older they get with the majority spending their free time in their local area. Home is still the second highest response though, even though they have access to many more facilities than the younger age groups. However, school is not regarded as a place for playing or hanging out with friends by this age.

Summary

5 to 7 year olds play at home and at school

7 to 11 year olds play at home, park and other leisure facilities

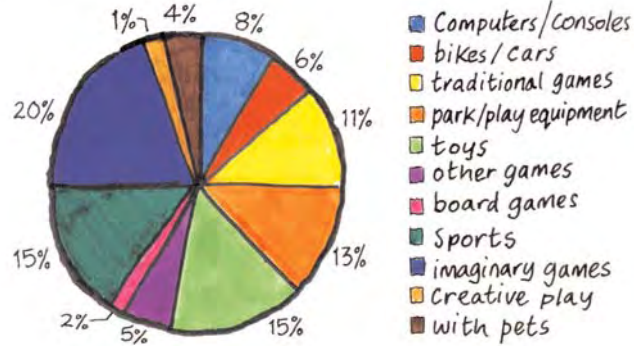
11 to 14 year olds play in their local area and home

What do we think?

The results demonstrate that children see school as a place of play decreases with age, this is linked to an increase in choice. It is good to see that home is an important place to play for all ages. The local area and leisure facilities are important to all ages. Further work should look at this in more detail. Local authorities should evaluate local areas to see how they are used, especially with the 11 to 14 year olds.

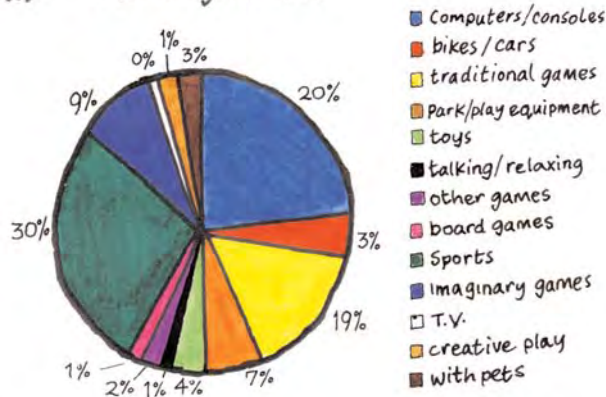
Defining evaluation themes such as 'where in the local area do children and young people play' would inform us on how and why these spaces are used, and could also act as a basis for future evaluations. Access to leisure facilities should also be addressed, there is obviously potential for this % to increase and attention should be given to 'how'.

What - 5 to 7 year olds



When asked what is your favourite thing to play, the 5 to 7 year olds age group like to play imaginary games the most; these include playing school, mami's and dadi's, shop etc. And are closely followed by playing with their toys e.g. dolls, teddy and lego a very popular answer; and thirdly sports.

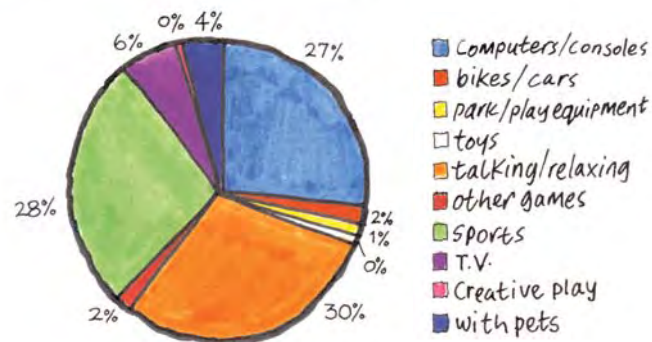
What - 7 to 11 year olds



The 7 to 11 year olds biggest category was sports with a huge majority choosing football; 10% lower than that were computers (including facebook and msn) and consoles (PSP; Wii) followed closely by what was termed as 'traditional' games such as tag, stuck in the mud and hide and seek.



What - 11 to 14 year olds



The 11 to 14 year olds enjoyed talking, relaxing or just 'hanging out' with their friends as their favourite pastime. Sports, again with football taking the majority share, and computers and consoles came a close second and third. Imaginary playing and traditional games were not in any of the responses from this age group, which demonstrates the changing nature of how children and young people spend their free time the older they get.

Summary

Most 5 to 7 year olds play imaginary games and with toys

Most 7 to 11 year olds play sports, computers and traditional games

Most 11 to 14 year olds like talking/hanging out, sports and computers

What do we think?

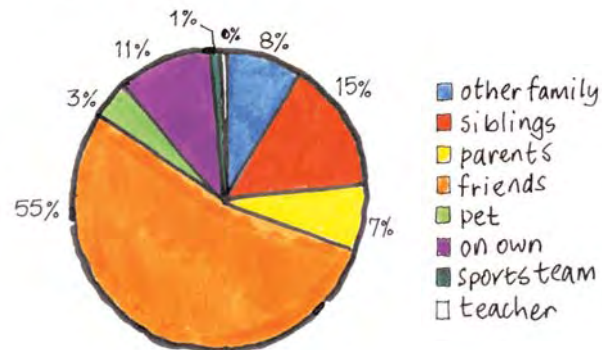
Imaginary games decrease with age. This is linked to more choice. Although computers and consoles are a big part of what the children and young people chose to do, it is not the biggest. Sports are the favourite past time of 7 to 14 year olds. The popularity of computers has increased in recent years and is a growing trend. Children are less policed on computers and offers a level of freedom children do not have outside.

It is important to note that a lot of these responses were msn and facebook; and online gaming on consoles. In these cases the children and young people are still playing with friends and this result does not necessarily mean the children are 'alone'. Sport is still the biggest answer given by the 7 to 14 year olds. Being outside playing football with friends was the best thing to do. It is important that local authorities look at their outdoor space, evaluate how they are used and ensure they are accessible to all. Open space is a cheap option for children and young people and should not be underestimated!

Within the overall results, sport has the clear majority when combining the results for all age ranges, with computers/consoles and traditional games coming second and third respectively. What is surprising is how low TV and creative games such as drawing and colouring came; TV was third from the bottom so the perception that kids want to watch TV a lot is wrong – although they do like to play their computers and consoles!

Who do you like playing with? Total responses - 1129

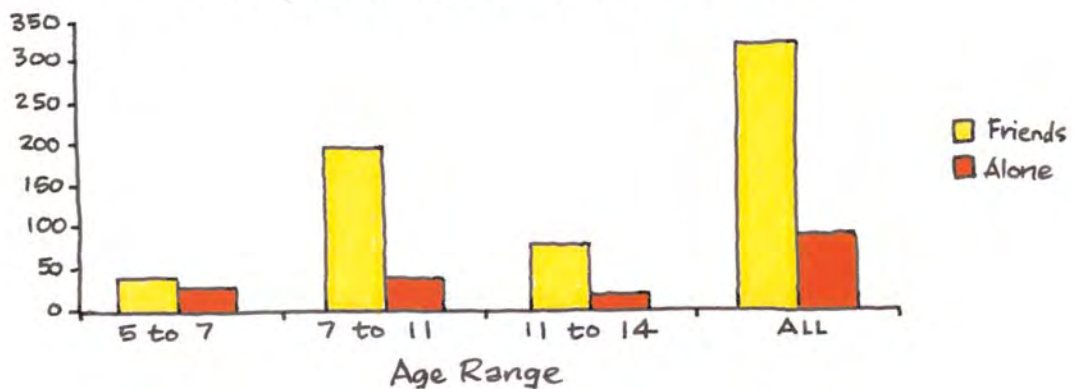
Who - all ages



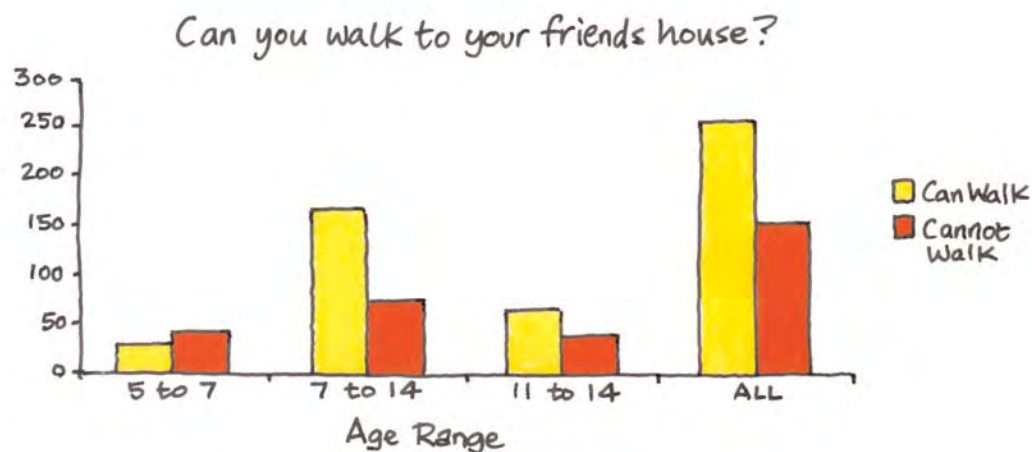
Friends is the biggest category for all three age groups when asked who do they like playing with. For the 5 to 11 year olds, brothers and sisters came second whilst playing on their own was third.

For the 11 to 14 age group, friends once again is the top answer but other family (cousins, parents, grandparents) are more popular than siblings. Even being by themselves was a more popular answer than spending time with their brothers or sisters! Teacher also wasn't an answer given by this age group as someone they liked to be with, unlike the other two age groups.

Would you rather play with friends or alone?



Overall, 22% of those questioned would prefer to play alone than with friends. This could be imaginary games or playing on computers and consoles. The youngest age group has 41% playing alone, but as they are also the ones least likely to be able to walk to a friend's house they may not have a choice in the matter. Also, this age range has the best imagination and can think of many games to play by themselves.



It is not surprising to see that the 5 to 7 year age group have a higher number of those that cannot walk to their friend's house considering their young age. However, 70% of the 7 to 11 age group can walk to their friend's house, compared to 63% of the 11 to 14 age group. This is likely to be due to children moving up to Comprehensive school and their friends then tend to live further away, rather than parents not allowing them. Overall, 63% of the children and young people that responded can walk to their friend's house.

Summary

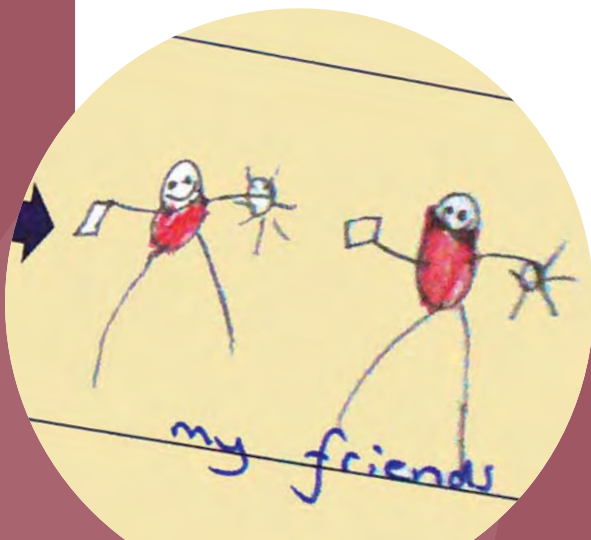
5 to 7 year olds top three are friends, siblings and on their own

7 to 11 year olds chose friends, siblings and on their own

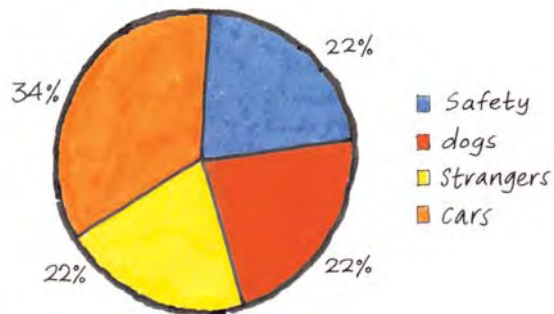
11 to 14 year olds chose friends, other family and on their own

What do we think?

Friends always come on top when asking children and young people who do they prefer to play/hang out with. However, siblings seem to get less important whilst other family (e.g. cousins) get more important. This may be due to having less in common with siblings as a teen and more in common with similar aged cousins, along with the opportunity to be able to walk to their houses rather than stay at home. Again, this is highly likely to be due to having more choice.

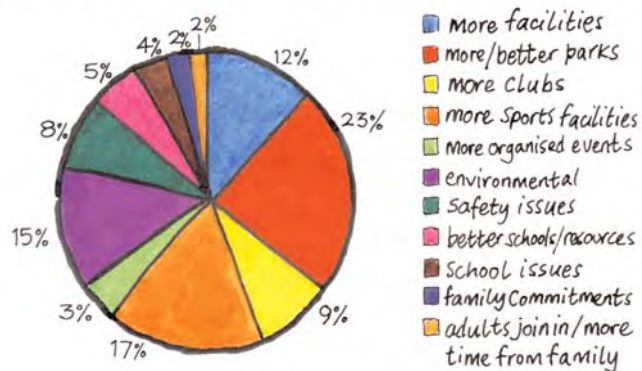


5 to 7 year olds - What is your advice to the government?



Although only a small number of infants were asked this question all answers related to safety; less cars to be on the road etc.

7 to 11 year olds - what is your advice to the government?



The juniors would like to see better park facilities and equipment. Sports facilities came next with requests for simple things like football goals on their local field to some AstroTurf. Environmental issues included more flowers, less rubbish and less dog mess around.

"Less people bossing you around"

"Police outside the school everyday to keep people off the yellow lines (safer for school)"

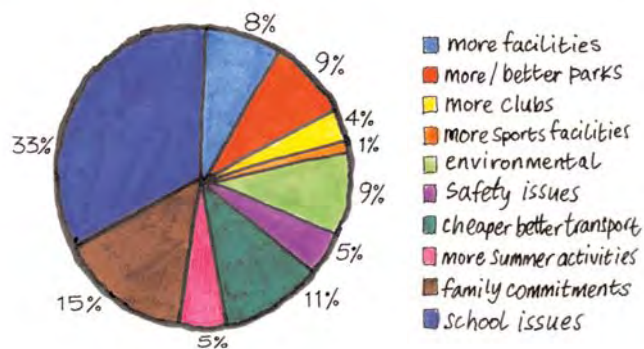
"Please may you make more clubs for children playing and fun,
make more children have fun"

"Something to do when it rains"

"Make more places, whereas parks and clubs have a restricted age limit...
should have places for any age (teenagers to go to a place whereas,
under age get bored and go to any place, then police are onto you)"

"Shorten holidays so we are in school a longer time but shorter hours,
then when holidays are shortened – like from 6 weeks to 4
then it doesn't drag on and we will remember work from before –
so basically, shorten school hours and be in school for more days"

11 to 14 year olds- what is your advice to the government?



The biggest thing that stopped young people from playing was related to school – the 33% shown in the graph above came from answers of less homework and less school. Family commitments came next which included chores, walking the dog etc.

“Fry your brain if you didn’t have freedom”

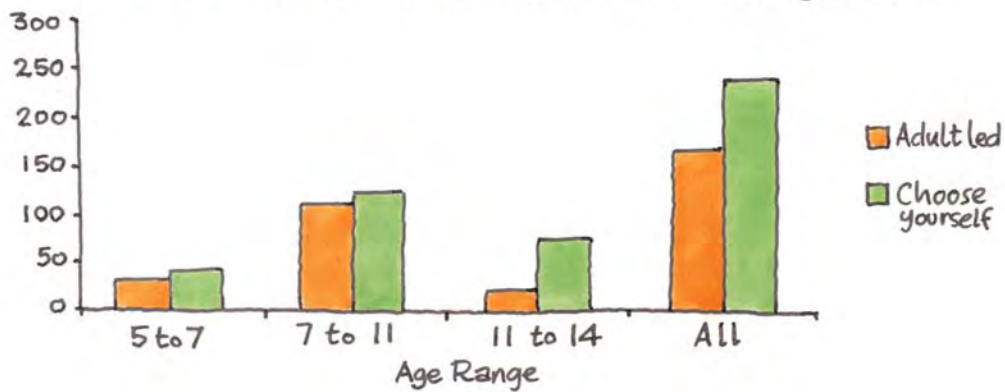
“In school you should only be allowed one piece of homework from every lesson a week”

“Put old people into a quiet little home where nobody plays football outside their house, so they don’t complain”

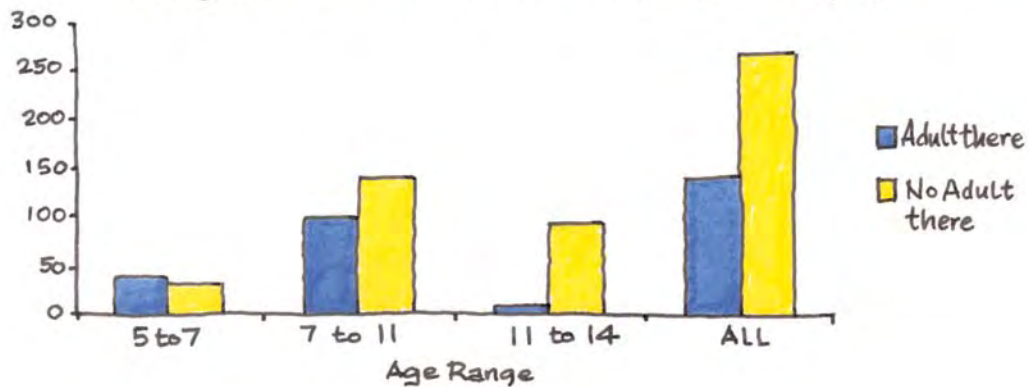
“Don’t tell us to get away from the street when we are just chilling”

“In Aberbargoed we need more things like a swimming pool and things like that. We’ve got nothing there except a library and a youth club and it’s only open two days a week from half six to half eight, they paid loads of money for it and it is never open”

Would you rather adult led activities or choose yourself?



Would you prefer an adult there when playing/hanging out?



Summary

5 to 7 year olds want to feel safer

7 to 11 year olds want better parks, more sports facilities and a better looking environment e.g. no dog mess, litter or glass, more flowers etc

11 to 14 year olds want their school concerns addressed and fewer family commitments

What do we think?

Safety, environmental issues and school are the usual responses play consultations uncover. This consultation has shown them in order of importance of age group. Younger children want to feel safe, junior children want more/better outdoor activities and teenagers want/need less homework. None of these findings are surprising. However, when these results are combined with the findings from the dot voting asking children and young people whether they would prefer adult led activities or to chose themselves, the older they got the less adult involvement they wanted. Is this because they have become disengaged? Local authorities need to address this by getting further research done on the question.

We also asked if you would prefer and adult there when playing/hanging out. For the older age group, a very small number wanted an adult present. Could this be linked to their negative attitude towards adults due to them being moved on, complained about if there is any noise etc. Work needs to be done to maintain the energetic and enthusiasm young children have towards adults and facilities/activities into their teens.

Peer Research

Part of the research included running peer research sessions in two primary schools which consisted of year 6 pupils conducting research with year 1 and 2 pupils. The peer research work is an extension of a project Funky Dragon conducted up to February 2009 called Children as Researchers where children were given the opportunity to decide on a research topic and run the project in their local area. The involvement of children as researchers is still relatively new in the field of research. In the wake of the UNCRC (1989) there are more examples of children as active researchers emerging. For further information Funky Dragon's Children as Researchers report is available to download on the Funky Dragon Junior website.

The findings from both research projects can be found in the Appendices. The reports are from children alone and none of the text has come from adults.

Summary

5 to 7 year olds

- play is a time to learn to be nice
- like to play at home and at school
- play imaginary games and with toys
- play with friends, siblings and on their own
- want to feel safer

7 to 11 year olds

- recognise play as fun but also as a way to keep fit
- play at home, the park and other leisure facilities
- play sports, computers and traditional games
- play with friends, siblings and on their own
- feel that lack of time is the biggest barrier to them playing
- want better parks, more sports facilities and a better looking environment
- e.g. no dog mess, litter or glass, and more flowers

11 to 14 year olds

- recognise that play is something that is freely chosen and time to spend with friends
- play/hang out in their local area and home
- like talking/hanging out, sports and computers
- hang out with friends, other family and on their own
- feel that school and homework is their biggest barrier to free time
- want their school concerns addressed and fewer family commitments

Conclusion

Core Aim 4

"Core Aim 4 requires that all children and young people have access to play, leisure, sporting and cultural activities."

Local authorities should plan with their partners to provide play opportunities for children and young people. Youth support services should provide young people with their entitlement to accessible recreational and social opportunities, sports, culture, music and arts.

A range of organisations provide play, leisure, sporting and cultural activities for children and young people. They include:

- local authority leisure and recreational services
- Integrated Children's Centres
- youth support services
- voluntary organisations

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/childrenyoungpeople/leisure/> Cited 22 March 2010

The introduction for this research report warns that to ask children what they like to play will only entice limited answers based on their realms of understanding. The aim of this report was not therefore to try and get children and young people to tell the Welsh Assembly what to do to allow them to play more; it was to enable the Welsh Assembly to better understand why children play and what stops them from accessing play.

The results have demonstrated a variety of reasons which will need a variety of responses by local authorities and the Welsh Assembly. For the younger age group of 5 to 7 year olds, they are very much in the dark as to what opportunities are out there for them to access. They are dependent on teachers and parents to allow them to access play opportunities, however it seems that their favourite playtime is imaginary play. Pretending to work in a shop, or be a superhero or princess. Their imaginations provide them with a world adults have very little understanding of. Whatever access a child has to play, they will make the most of it and enjoy it for what it is. Free time is important to them as it allows them to be whoever they want to be. It is parents who restrict access to play outside the home for this age group; reasons as to why they do this will need to be investigated further. Traffic, access to a local park, even weather could be influencing factors but it is difficult to speculate and further research is needed in this area.

The Foundation Phase for this age group provides children with the opportunity to develop their understanding of their world through play; but consideration needs to be given as to how they access play opportunities outside school hours and where responsibility for this lies.

For the 7 to 11 year olds, they have more freedom to access play opportunities without their parents placing restrictions on them. They have the energy to play and can go out to play with friends with a lower degree of parental restrictions. Formal play opportunities are more readily available to this age group (swimming lessons; football club; golf; horse riding) but free play and green spaces to run around in should not be ignored or their importance not recognised. Whilst at the same time, fitting children's play into a timetable of a 'play bus' being in the local area, one day a week for two hours or employing a play worker in the local youth club for an hour a week should not be deemed as providing sufficient play opportunities.

Sports was a popular play choice for this age group, whether this was formal e.g. football games or just kicking a ball around in the street with some friends. This age group has loads of energy and need access to places that parents feel are safe enough to let them out of the house without supervision, and without the worry of traffic.

For the 11 to 14 year olds, the freedom to play/hang out is greater but it seems that they prefer to stay indoors on their computers and games consoles – although with computers they stated msn and facebook, or online gaming, as a popular past time, which means that they were still keeping in touch with friends. But again consideration needs to be given to their needs. Parks are suitable for the younger age groups but as one 13 year old said, 'we just want some benches'. They realise that parks are there for the younger children but there isn't any provision being made for their needs. They don't favour clubs organised by adults and prefer to do things on their own, and are not adult led. School issues came up a lot for this age group with too much homework and time being spent in school, whilst also saying that their holidays were too long.

Core aim 4 states that children and young people should have access to play, leisure, sporting and cultural activities. Whilst play and sports were popular answers in the research, leisure was less so, and cultural activities was rarely mentioned. Some children mentioned piano and drumming lessons, but from this study arts and music is not seen as something children and young people enjoyed doing in their free time. Reasons for this could include that children and young people have not had access to this type of activity and are therefore not aware of them; or they may have tried them and not liked them.

In the new Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010, under play opportunities, it states that:

"A local authority must assess the sufficiency of play opportunities in its area for children in accordance with regulations."

It is vitally important that the children and young people within that local authority are consulted as to whether they feel the play opportunities are sufficient. A local authority may feel it has ample parks but if the park is not well lit, or are difficult to access e.g. down a muddy path; or may be next to a busy road where parents don't feel comfortable in leaving children alone there, the children will not play there. Adults cannot (and should not) provide facilities on the assumption that they know what children and young people want.

Local authorities also need to take play spaces into consideration when giving planning permission for houses to be built. Parks and open spaces should be included in the plans and not as an inconvenient add on at the end; people buying the houses can then decide whether they wish to buy a house close to the park or not. Families with children can then choose to live closer to the parks.

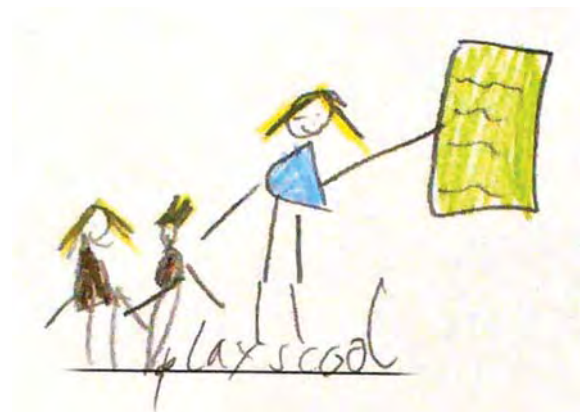
This research was to give a brief outline of what children and young people in Wales think of their play opportunities and access to it, but with a small sample taken from across Wales it is difficult to generalise across the whole of the country. Local authorities should now take responsibility and ensure that children and young people's voices are heard.

What next?

Further areas of research are required in this area. It is important to ensure that children's play isn't left to chance whilst the same time allowing children the choice of where and when they want to play. Further research could be carried out as to what apparatus children like to play with the most? What would children add/take away from their local area (if they could)? Giving children an option as to what they could play if they had access to it could be researched further, i.e. if a child has never had access to an adventure playground how do they know they'd like to play there? Would children like to have a playworker in their local area, again this decision is dependent on them having experience of this before they can make an informed decision.

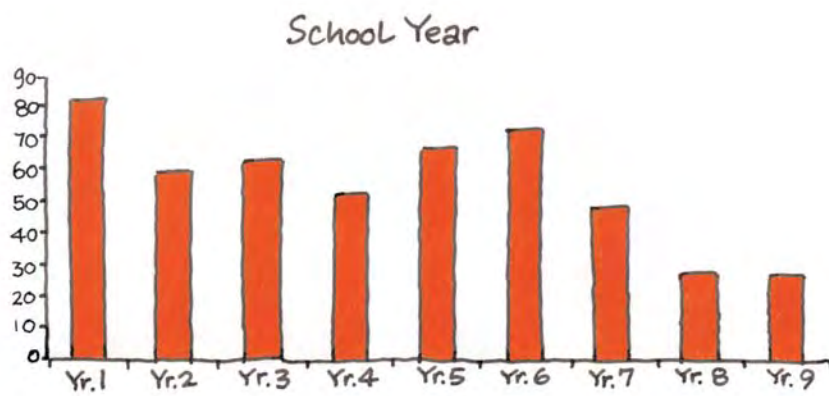
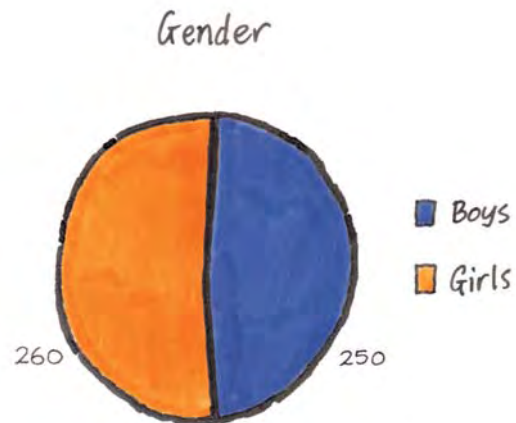
This research was conducted in January and February. It would be interesting to see if the results would be similar if it was carried out again in the summer months when children had more free time and the weather was more conducive to outside play. It would also be interesting to see if there were variances between urban and rural areas; and are there gender differences in what children chose to do in their free time. For example, do boys prefer computers and playing alone over girls?

The aim of this report was to give a flavour of what was going on with play and free time but there is further research needed to fully understand how children's and young people's needs can be better served by the local authority and Welsh Assembly Government.

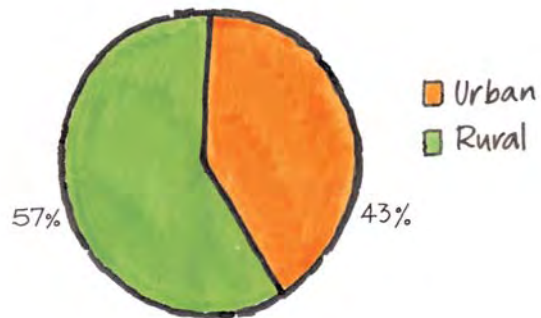


Demographics

In total 510 children and young people took part in the research and are broken down as follows:



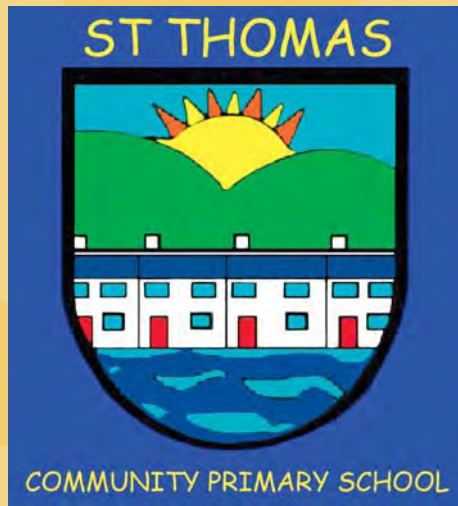
School



Welsh speaker 123 Disabled 3 Ethnic minority 15

Play is good because
you get to make up
your own rules
~~and make up your~~
do what you like.

Appendices



PLAY REPORT



Funky dragon and the point of this report

As part of this consultation we worked with a group of children to conduct their own investigations about what their peers thought about play.

The following is a report that was designed, facilitated and written by a group of children. It outlines their approach to their project, what they found out and what they thought.

The aim of this is to enable adults to understand how children perceive play first hand. It is also hoped that this will inspire other adults to include the ideas of children in the development and implementations of their play policies.

**Dragon Living
Funky Dragon**



THE TEAM



Why did we do it?

We are a group of children at St Thomas Community Primary School and we had to find out information from 5-7 year olds to see if they like playing. We did this because Andrea from Funky Dragon asked us to because the Welsh Assembly asked her. We spent the day asking children aged 5-7 years old their ideas about play.



What did we do?

This morning we wrote on paper what questions we would like some of the infant classes about their free time. We also played a guessing game to remind us about open and closed questions.

We then went around different infant classes and asked the questions which involved them putting their hands up and down to answer them. We asked them about what they do in their spare time inside and outside their homes.

We then split into 2 groups and took turns to interview two groups of children from the infants and in the end we found out the results we needed.

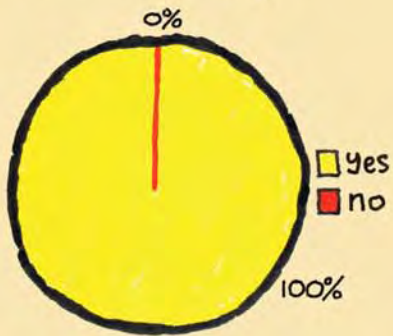
And then we wrote our report.



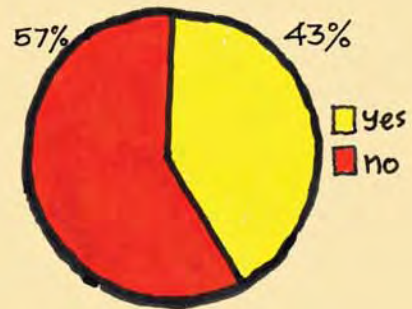
Closed questions

The closed questions children from year 1 and 2 were asked are shown below with the results.

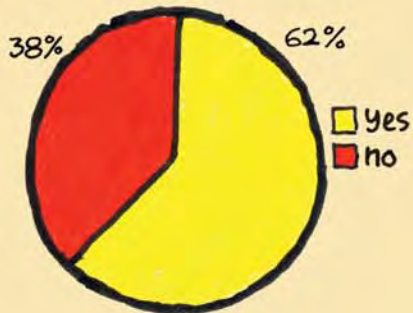
Do you like playing?



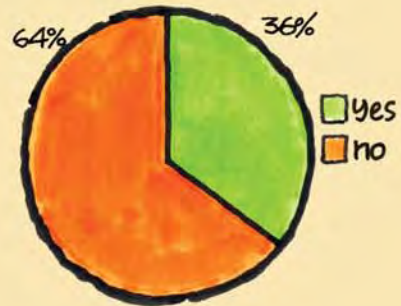
Do you prefer playing on your own?



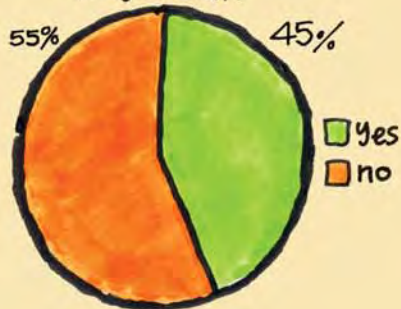
Do you prefer to play outside?



Are you allowed out to play on your own?



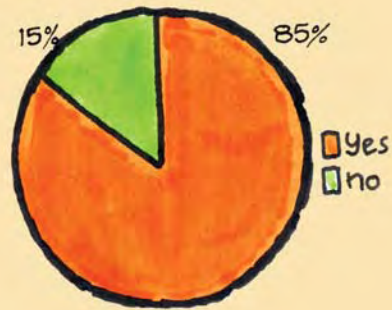
Can you walk to your friends on your own?



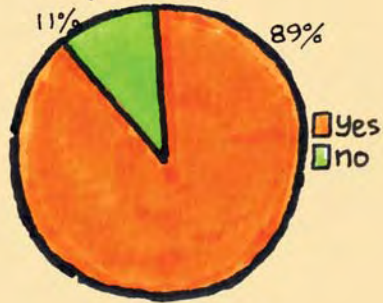
Do you like playing in your house?



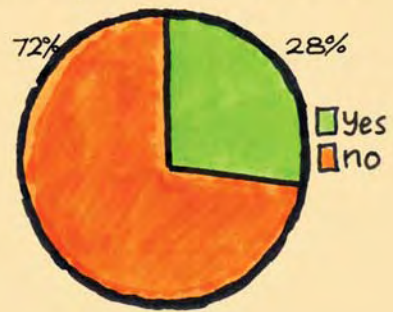
Do you play in your back garden?



Do you go down the park with your parents?



Do things stop you going outside?





Year six children with some of the year two children that were interviewed



Interviews with year 2 children



Working hard

What we think

I was surprised that 45% of children go to their friend's house on their own at the age of 5-7 because it is dangerous and not safe.

I was surprised that 43% out of 100% liked playing on their own. I would rather play with my friends.

I was surprised that 28% of all the children were scared to go outside because of bullies (with knives and they said slingshots), glass, night time etc...

I was surprised because 100% of children like playing.

What shocked me was that 45% of children think they are allowed to knock for their friends on their own at the age of 5 to 7. The reason I was shocked was because they are really young.

I was shocked because 45% of children can walk to their friends on their own at the age 5 to 7.

I was surprised that 43% of children prefer playing on their own. It shocked me because I thought children loved playing with their friends and they will learn if they play together.

I was shocked that 42% of children prefer to play on their own because it's more fun with friends.

I don't believe that 45% of children said they can walk to their friend's house on their own because they are only 6 or 7.



Funky Dragon would like to say thank you to St Thomas Community Primary for taking in part in this project.

Funky Dragon would also give a big thank you to the group of children that ran this play project and the authors of this report