practice

Practice: searching and re/searching

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Introduction

Searching and re/searching describes processes which individuals undertake to satisfy their curiosity about something of which they want to know to more. This state of curiosity is no less important in the field of playwork practice as practitioners and academics seek to uncover the understandings about the circumstances of their discipline and how it interacts with the wider landscape of social being. What makes this curiosity change from searching to researching is the use of a systematic approach. Researching is an iterative activity that embraces methodologies that structure the gathering of knowledge. These insights can be used in a number of ways including deepening understandings for practitioners or helping to advocate with policymakers or funding bodies.

Each of the articles contained in this section highlight the links that turn curiosity about the impact of playwork practice on the lives of children and adults into activities of searching or researching. Fitzpatrick and Handscomb's curiosity is focused within the adventure playground. However Podyma, Clarke and Barclay and Tawil discuss the impetus for their searching for information as a way to provide evidence to support the governance structures that help to fund playwork initiatives within the community.

Fitzpatrick and Handscomb describe a research project about adventure playgrounds that was stimulated by their curiosity to know more. The emphasis which they place on meaning-making reminds us that it is not enough just to be curious, nor is it enough to search for some information using research protocols. It is equally important to be able to translate findings through searching and re/searching into understandings that are able to be shared with others. They describe the practice of playworkers within the adventure playground and how it affected children and the adults in that environment. They stress that understandings can be gained in collaborative activity – searching and re/searching ‘with’, rather than ‘about’.

Podyma advocates that political leaders and policy makers searching for answers to social problems should look closely at the positive impacts of play and playwork provision on children, families and community wellbeing, particularly as an early intervention strategy. In contrast to imposing blunt instruments and punitive approaches on communities, Podyma stresses using playwork practice to enhance community wellbeing. He suggests that a cost–benefit analysis of the impact of the different intervention models would tip in favour of playwork practice.

Barclay and Tawil advocate for the importance of having valid and reliable information about Wrexham's Play Sufficiency Assessment as part of the council's duties in making a response to the Welsh government. The Play Sufficiency Assessment is about opportunities for play as part of the *Children and Families Measure* (2010). This initiative has had considerable investment of funds. Subsequently the research partnership between Wrexham County Borough Council's Play Development Team and Glyndwr University has responded to the local authority's requirement to provide evidence. This initiative has involved both searching and researching, and Barclay and Tawil have described some of the ways that their curiosity about the impact of play opportunities on local communities has influenced their investigations.

Clarke's professional capabilities in evaluation, honed in areas other than playwork, are helping playwork practitioners on adventure playgrounds to search and to become researchers. Clarke's enthusiastic description of her involvement in the Play Works project highlights how important it is to have the skills and tools to undertake research that can provide measures with which to satisfy funding bodies about the impact of adventure playgrounds in their local communities.

What this practitioner section of *Journal of Playwork Practice* clearly demonstrates is that searching and re/searching are integral to playwork practice in order to provide insights to a wide range of stakeholders. These insights stimulate curiosity, deepen understandings and provide platforms for shared knowledge about the impact of playwork practice on children, practitioners, interdisciplinary activities and the wider community.

Note

¹ Associate Editor, *Journal of Playwork Practice*.