

*For the attention of members of  
Wales' Children, Young People and Education Committee*

**ARE OUR CHILDREN'S LIVES BEING PUT AT RISK?**

and

**IS THE WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT PARTY TO THAT RISK?**

This paper is to draw attention to the promotion of 'DEEP PLAY' as an element in Play Wales/Chwarae Cymru's framework for Playwork as described in its publication called

### **'THE FIRST CLAIM'**

**A component of this framework is the assertion that "...when adults observe children taking part in deep play they may perceive it to be extremely dangerous and even life threatening."**

In the context of its remit to "scrutinise expenditure, administration and policy matters, encompassing, but not restricted to the education, health and well-being of the children and young people of Wales, including their social care.", the authors of this paper would welcome a response from the Committee on the acceptability of a position that allows life-risking activities within its purview. Also, from a parent's perspective, is it reasonable that a third party playworker (however well qualified) should take decisions in loco parentis that they themselves would not sanction?

### **BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT**

The Welsh Assembly Government is continually funding an organisation called Play Wales which they founded in 1997. This organisation is a charity and as such they are not governed by public organisation rules. A good example of this is that they have refused a freedom of information request for sources of educational material they have supplied to the Welsh Assembly Government funded educational service Adult Learning Wales. Adult Learning Wales in turn refused to provide the same information based on the fact that Play Wales held the copyright. Both organisations receive the majority of their funding from the Welsh Assembly Government. Further research into the published educational material of Play Wales has shown that the organisation Play Wales are a 'political' organisation whose area of expertise are the 'politics' of why children should play as opposed to the 'mechanics' of how children play and how children can be supported in their 'play and recreation as outlined in the UNCRC Article 31 and the Welsh Assembly Government 2014 statutory guidance. The result of this support for a 'political' based organisation is that for the last 20 years the Welsh Assembly Government have been supporting an organisation whose focus is on the perverted 'play' beliefs of Bob Hughes, not on the quality of play of Welsh children.

### **ABOUT BOB HUGHES**

Bob Hughes is a Playwork Education specialist who founded Play Education in 1982. Mr Hughes is the founding father of a style of play called "Evolutionary Playwork". He believes that children are a different species and should play in the wild, benefiting from the evolutionary learning process that wild play without adults brings. The primary objective of his playwork educational material is to encourage playworkers to subject children to survival type situations which will build survival skills and resilience in children. This he believes is the evolutionary process which will benefit human kind and save it from extinction. He believes that every child should experience the wonder of fire daily

and that every child needs to burn their fingers so they understand the power of fire. His opinion of bullying is that it is a form of hierarchy in the playground and he finds it entertaining that people find it difficult to cope with bullying. He believes that foul language, racism and homophobic abuse are all part of the childhood experience and playworkers should only intervene in a negative play situation as a last resort. Bob Hughes' idea of an ideal play area is an adventure playground built by the children themselves where the fittest and strongest reign supreme and everyone else is literally fighting for survival as adults watch on entertained by the processes involved. Bob Hughes' methods of play are dangerous to children and life threatening. He has introduced into the Welsh play curriculum 'deep play' which is children playing in life endangering situations. He believes that 'deep play' is essential for the personal development of children.

## **DEEP PLAY**

What is 'deep play'?

'Deep play' includes a form of play where children are placed into a life endangering situation, where they learning the value of 'death' through play.

In the Welsh Assembly Government funded publication "The First Claim" the following are given as examples of this aspect of 'deep play '

'CHILDREN PLAYING IN FRONT OF TRAFFIC'

'RIDING A BIKE ON A PARAPET OF A BRIDGE'

'RIDING A BIKE THROUGH A FIRE'

'HIGH TREE CLIMBING, ESPECIALLY OVER RIVERS OR THE SEA'

'PLAY IN WHICH THE STAKES ARE SO HIGH, THAT IS.. IRRATIONAL .. TO ENGAGE IN IT AT ALL'

Bob Hughes initially identified 'deep play' as a type of play in his work "A Playworker's Taxonomy of Play Types" (Playlink 1996). the scientific source of 'deep play' is given as....

'Deep Play: a description of a Balinese Cockfight'. Daedalus, No 101 (Daedalus is an academic journal published in the United States)

Deep play was first introduced into the Welsh national play curriculum in 2001 by Bob Hughes in the publication "The First Claim" ( copyright Bob Hughes and Play Wales 2001). This publication is referenced in courses currently run by the Welsh Assembly Government funded organisation Adult Learning Wales and the booklet can still be purchased directly from the Welsh Assembly Government funded charity Play Wales.

The Level 2 Award in Playwork Practice course points playworkers in the direction of "The First Claim" to help with reflection and close examination of their playwork practice....

*"Tools such as The First Claim... assessment frameworks can help with this" -*  
PWAL2018LAP022-08

The Preface is written by Mike Greenaway, Director, Play Wales who suggests the contents of the book are evidence based research.

*"The development of "the first claim" has been informed by scientific literature and encompasses the evolutionary, adaptational and therapeutic aspects of play."-*  
PWAL2008TFC000g-vi-pf1-02

In Section 2 of "The First Claim", ( page 10) in the chapter titled " Risk - Risk in a child's behaviour", we are told that 'deep play' is essential to children.....,

*Although always important, the issue of risk management becomes even more critical when children are participating in 'deep play'. (Hughes, 1996a) ((A Playworker's Taxonomy of Play Types)). This particular play type is essential for a child's personal development. Deep play means that children engage in play, which enables them to explore their own range of abilities, develop survival skills and experience fear and the conquest of fear. On the face of it when adults observe children taking part in deep play they may perceive it to be extremely dangerous and life threatening.-*  
PWAL2008TFC010-03

***"This particular play type is essential for a child's personal development."***

The Intermediate Framework provides a quality assessment for playworkers. 'Deep play' is included in this framework, the more points a playworker scores in the framework, the better the playworker. Therefore, playworkers are encouraged to provide 'deep play' to children so that they can score more points and achieve a higher grade. As seen previously it is *"essential for a child's personal development"*.

The term 'deep play' as used in the Play Wales publication "The First Claim" is taken from an article dated 1972 in the academic journal Daedalus and written by anthropologist Clifford Geertz where the author references Bentham.

The phrase 'deep play' was coined by Jeremy Bentham 1748-1832 in his "The Theory of Legislation" originally published in French and translated into English by Richard Hildreth in 1840 ([source Stanford University website](#)).

The article titled "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight" is about the Indonesian obsession with gambling on cockfights. Geertz, an anthropologist, learned about this illegal pastime during a study visit to Bali in 1958. 'Deep play' refers to adult male gamblers who bet far higher stakes than they can afford to lose in cockfights. Geertz

goes on to describe these gamblers as *"irrational - addicts, fetishists, children, fools, savages who need only to be protected against themselves"* (CGEE1972DPN015). Geertz only uses the term 'children' as an adjective to describe these adults as immature, he also states that Bentham thought that 'deep play' should be made illegal.

Bob Hughes has taken the term 'deep play' out of context from this article as we can see from his interpretation of 'deep play' is his book 'Evolutionary Playwork'

*"Geertz (1972) implied that Deep play's function might be to bring [children] alongside mortality so they can learn not to fear death"* - BHUG2011EPL112

If we look at the Balinese article and Bob Hughes definition we will see that he has misrepresented Geertz work. The Geertz article does not make reference to children taking 'high stakes' physical risks. There is no correlation with child's play or 'children' taking 'life threatening' risks during play in the article. The Balinese Cockfight article is about adult males taking high stake financial risks and not about children taking life endangering risks. Geertz also states that anyone attempting 'deep play' should be protected from themselves, meaning he did not think that 'deep play' was a good idea.

The author (Bob Hughes) of "The First Claim" has deliberately targeted an obscure publication and mis-represented its contents to further his standing in the field of play education. He did this in 1996 before the general popularity of the world wide web in the knowledge that it was almost impossible to check his facts without the original publication to hand. However, the modern day internet now allows researchers to analyse source information more closely bringing mis-representation such as this into the public domain.

To support our analysis that Bob Hughes had mis-represented Geertz work we contacted two of Clifford Geertz's former PhD students, both now professors of anthropology in American universities. Lawrence Rosen, Professor of Anthropology at Princeton University and George E Marcus, Professor of Anthropology at University of California, Irvine We asked them "what they thought Geertz's opinion would be on Bob Hughes interpretation of 'deep play'? Both professors were in agreement that Hughes had misrepresented Geertz work. Professor Rosen was of the opinion:

*"I think the idea that one can encourage or discourage certain forms of children's play based on a simple calculus of an isolated factor does indeed miss Geertz's point and is rather a perversion of his approach than an application of it."*

Professor Marcus was of the opinion that Hughes definition of 'deep play' was

*"a complete distortion of how Geertz thought and developed interpretation."*

he went on to say that anyone placing *"children in real danger is reckless!"*

To summarise, two United States University professors of anthropology who knew Geertz personally in an academic capacity believe that Bob Hughes has mis-represented Clifford Geertz work on 'deep play'. One says it's a perversion, the other a distortion.

Both Bob Hughes and Mike Greenaway of Play Wales say that there is ample evidence to support this hypothesis. Their 'evidence', however, is abstract, not factually-based and cannot therefore be considered as anything more than assertion, belief or conviction (in the same way that could be said of a cult or sect).

For parents to entrust the safety of their children to Playworkers who support the principle and practice of Deep Play (in a potentially life-threatening context) cannot be considered logical or acceptable to them as parents or to society generally. When you consciously risk a child's life you are not fulfilling a required duty of care.

By allowing 'deep play' to remain on the Welsh Assembly Government funded play curriculum the Welsh Assembly Government are failing in this duty of care to the children in Wales.

## **DEEP PLAY TIMELINE**

In 2001 Play Wales introduced a play curriculum which included 'deep play'.

In 2002 the Welsh Assembly Government introduced their first Play Policy which included references to children taking 'appropriate risks' as part of play. 'Deep play' is already on the playwork curriculum therefore it must be considered an appropriate risk.

The 2006 the Welsh Assembly Government's Play Policy Implementation Plan is seen to champion risk above the safety of children with a risk versus benefit approach to children's play.

2014 - Wales - a Play Friendly Country - Statutory Guidance still includes appropriate risk,

2018 - We informed the Minister for Children that Play Wales intentions were to harm children. The minister refused to investigate our concerns.

5 July 2019 - We provided evidence to Jeremy Miles, AM for Neath that the Welsh Assembly Government policies included 'deep play'.

2019 - 'Deep play' is still on the Welsh Assembly Government funded play curriculum.

The danger for the Welsh Assembly Government is that, inadvertently, they are seen as prepared to sanction unreasonable risk. Mistakes in judgment can and will be made and children will sooner or later die as a consequence of putting principle before practice.

END OF REPORT

## **AUTHOR INFORMATION**

Dai Richards - Dai is a father of 4 and grandfather of 2 who has previously worked in sport and education. He has worked extensively with children in a sporting environment and has successfully run his own company since 1991. In 2016 his first book "Understanding the Origin and Evolution of Sport" was published.

Neilson Kite - is a qualified schoolteacher with specific schools' experience in Sweden and Kenya as well as UK, and latterly session lecturer at Gloucestershire and Worcestershire Universities. Director of several high tech businesses and organisations and trading as an independent business consultant with assignments completed for United Nations, European Union, the DTI and other bodies. Author of 'Understanding Emotional Intelligence (published by Kogan Page and latterly converted into a USA e-learning programme and audio book). Extensive experience in delivering communications courses to local authorities in South Wales.

## CONTACT INFO

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## **APPENDIX**

i - Excerpts from pages 10, 35 & 46 of "The First Claim".

ii - 'Deep play' as part of the 'Intermediate Quality Assessment' Framework on page 31 of "The First Claim".

Although always important, the issue of risk management becomes even more critical when children are participating in 'deep play'. (Hughes, 1996a) This particular play type is essential for a child's personal development. Deep play means that children engage in play, which enables them to explore their own range of abilities, develop survival skills and experience fear and the conquest of fear. On the face of it when adults observe children taking part in deep play they may perceive it to be extremely dangerous and even life threatening.

PWAL2008TFC010-03

### **Creative Play**

Example: ...where children have access to lots of different creative mediums and tools, where there is plenty of time and where getting messy is not a problem. Koestler, A. (1967) ...a marriage of incompatibles.

### **Deep Play**

PWAL2008TFC035-04

Example: Children playing in front of traffic, riding a bike on the parapet of a bridge or through a fire, high tree climbing, especially over rivers or the sea. Geertz, C. (1972) Play in which the stakes are so high, that is...irrational...to engage in it at all.

### **Dramatic Play**

Example: A dramatisation of parents taking children to schools, of a TV show, of a conversation between two people, of a religious or festive event, even a funeral. Garvey, C. (1977) Play (which) involves recognisable characters and plots or storylines

Garvey, C. (1977) Play. London : Fontana/Open Books Original



Geertz, C. (1972) 'Deep Play : a Description of a Balinese Cockfight'. Daedalus, No. 101

PWAL2008TFC046-14

Geertz, C. (1973) The Interpretation of Cultures. New York : Basic Books

Gordon, C. (1999) 'Riskogenics : an exploration of risk'. PlayEd '99. Ely : PlayEducation

# THE INTERMEDIATE QUALITY ASSESSMENT

An Intermediate Assessment is made by an examination of three areas: Behavioural Modes, Indicators of Play Behaviour and Mood Descriptors. It is intended to reflect a short video, or an accumulated picture rather than a snapshot.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Normally
<b>1. Behavioural Modes</b>				
The children's behaviour as far as possible is:				
• freely chosen				
• personally directed				
• intrinsically motivated				
• in a secure context				
• spontaneous				
• goalless				
• where the content and intent is under their control				
<b>2. Indicators of Play Behaviour</b>				
The children's behaviour contains:				
• diversity of narratives & activity types				
• species & systems interaction				
play types				
• communication				
• creative				
• deep		1	2	3
• dramatic				
• exploratory				
• fantasy				
• imaginative				