

Dancing with the devil or a means to fulfil potential? Enumeration and playwork

McKendrick, John H.

Published in:

Further Perspectives on Researching Play from a Playwork Perspective: Process, Playfulness, Rights-based and Critical Reflection

Publication date:

2020

Document Version

Author accepted manuscript

[Link to publication in ResearchOnline](#)

Citation for published version (Harvard):

McKendrick, JH 2020, Dancing with the devil or a means to fulfil potential? Enumeration and playwork. in P King & S Newstead (eds), *Further Perspectives on Researching Play from a Playwork Perspective: Process, Playfulness, Rights-based and Critical Reflection*. Advances in Playwork Research, Routledge , Abingon, pp. 119.

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please view our takedown policy at <https://edshare.gcu.ac.uk/id/eprint/5179> for details of how to contact us.

This is a pre-publication version of the book chapter. More information about the book can be accessed [here](#).

Dancing with the devil or a means to fulfil potential? Enumeration and playwork.

John H. McKendrick

Abstract

Numbers are powerful. But power can be used for and used against. The perception pervades in playwork that enumeration is less important than narrative, while some even view that it is without merit and may even be oppressive. In this chapter, it is argued that playworkers – as well as the playwork profession as a whole – need to work with number in order to achieve the Playwork Principles. It starts by presenting arguments which suggest that enumeration is not the business of playwork and challenges these by reviewing the ways in which playwork is enumerated through reflective practice and research. The core argument – that playwork must enumerate – uses the Playwork Principles as a reference point, showing how each principle can be optimised through enumeration. In conclusion, it is argued that the challenge that lies ahead is how to embrace number without losing the prime focus and essence of playwork in facilitating the play process.

Introduction: Play-full and playful playwork

Enumeration is not alien to play and playwork. On the contrary, numbers are central to how play professionals make sense of their work – there are sixteen play types in Hughes’ (1996, 2002) taxonomy, eight Playwork Principles (Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group (PPSG), 2005), and in the UK the professional competency of playworkers is expressed in terms of the level (number) of National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) that has been achieved (City & Guilds (C&G), no date). Professional bodies that serve play and playwork are not averse to staking claim to being the first or biggest when showcasing their achievements or services (for example, Play Wales assert that ‘Wales is the first country in the world to legislate for children’s play’) or to celebrate the size of the play sector (for example, Play Scotland (no date) reports that there are 11,210 playworkers in Scotland working in after school clubs, holiday playschemes, adventure playgrounds, playbuses and breakfast clubs). The *International Journal of Playwork Practice* would not exist were it not able to demonstrate the existence of a sizeable readership and market. The achievements of candidates for awards in playwork are often quantified (for example, the assessments of those completing coursework in playwork degrees are typically expressed as a percentage, and their final Honours degree is described as 1st class, 2nd class or 3rd class). In rising to the challenge of the UK government to ‘make the case for play’ in the 1990s (Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), 2004), numbers were resources to be utilised as the profession sought to articulate the wider value of play in ways which resonated with funders, sceptics and decision-makers (Cole-Hamilton, Harrop, & Street, 2002; Cole-Hamilton, 2012). In many incidental and unrecognised ways, play and playwork function and prosper through number.

Notwithstanding the array of instructional texts that provide inspiration and guidance to early years educators and teachers with respect to how play can be used to promote numeracy (e.g. Barlow, 2017; Richardson, no date), some would contend that numbers belong to the realm of formal education, which is the antithesis of play (Sturrock, 2019). More generally, enumeration sits awkwardly with the creativity and creative disorder that are widely held to be defining features of play (Russ, 1998). It might also be argued that quantification implies simplification, which fails to convey the nuance and complexity of play. Not all were comfortable with evidencing the positive value of play and viewed such enumeration as the playthings of adult service managers who are far removed from the child-centred world of playwork. Indeed, it has proven that numbers giveth and numbers taketh away; the same resources that were used to evidence the case for play have also been frequently used to justify the scaling back and withdrawal of playwork funding in times of austerity (Hocker, 2014; McKendrick, Horton, Kraftl and Else., 2014; McKendrick et al., 2015). Such concerns extend beyond playwork. Wider society's disdain for 'creative accounting' (Houlder, 2016) and the popularity of the adage, 'there are lies, damned lies and statistics' attest to a wider distrust in the authority and reliability of number.

In this chapter, it is argued that while it would be dangerous not to acknowledge the limitations of enumeration, it would be equally problematic for playwork not to embrace, utilise and capitalise on the insight that can be afforded through quantification. More particularly, if playwork is to develop in the academy, it cannot afford to eschew quantitative research (Kuegel, 2017). While the rich descriptions that characterise so much qualitative research have been, and will continue to be,

invaluable to understanding playwork (King & Newstead, 2018, specifically Smith-Brennan, 2018; Russell, Lester & Smith, 2017a; Waters, 2018), quantitative research must not be under-valued. Big data is an emerging concern for many in wider society (Lohr, 2015) and the academy (Montgomery, 2015) at the current time, adding fresh impetus to those promoting understanding through number. Just as those who understand play are correct to implore others to realise their potential by being more playful, there is also a need for the field of playwork research to be more play-full by drawing more often from quantitative research.

At the outset of this chapter, some problems with numbers are considered. Ten general reservations about the value of quantitative knowledge are presented. However, the objective is not merely to acknowledge potential limitations for enumerating playwork; rather, it is contended that playwork research could overcome each. Having the potential to embrace number falls short of it being desirable to do so. The case for quantitative playwork research is considered by drawing on three key papers in playwork thinking; the Playwork Principles (PPSG, 2005) and two visions for playwork research futures. It is argued that delivering the Playwork Principles requires more prominence to be given to quantifying playwork than is proposed in these vision statements for playwork research. Arguing against those who dismiss the value of number (part one) and highlighting quantitative possibilities beyond what is proposed for the future of playwork research (part two) gives the misleading impression that playwork has not been enumerated. To counter this, the penultimate section of this chapter reviews some of the best examples of how we have come to better understand playwork through number. Finally, and in conclusion, an agenda is set to enrich playwork through enumeration.

The case for the defence – criticisms of quantitative research in playwork and some rejoinders

Dissatisfaction with quantification is expressed both in principle and practice. The quantitative revolution that swept through social science in the 1960s and 1970s capitalised on the wider availability of automated calculation through super-computers (Adams, 2014); it seemed to offer appropriate tools to address the emerging challenges of the day, such as the rediscovery of poverty, as the post-war consensus of unquestioned social progress began to unravel (Lowe, 1995). The counter-balance of a ‘cultural turn’ in research was a reaction against the quantitative knowledge that had been generated (Philo, 2000). Different tools were deployed in the service of alternative knowledge goals. Today, social research is a broad church with proponents of quantitative research and its abstract numerical modelling positioned at one end of the spectrum and qualitative research characterised by a focus on particularity, specificity and process at the other. Although often interested in the same issues, there often seems little in common between researchers pursuing knowledge at either end of the methodological spectrum. Table 1 is an example of the way in which these approaches to knowledge are typically presented to scholars of research methods.

(insert Table 1 about here)

On balance, playwork research has tended to adopt a qualitative approach to research. If it is accepted, as is posited in this chapter, that playwork is enriched when it draws from both research traditions, then two options present. One response may be the growth of multi-method research (third paradigm research), which seeks to blend the strengths and overcome the weaknesses of each approach in any given research project (King, 2018). Alternatively, this may be achieved through synthesis of the independently generated insights produced from quantitative playwork research and qualitative playwork research. Given that playwork research already appears to have comfortably embraced what qualitative research has to offer (King & Newstead, 2018; Russell et. al., 2017a), the first step toward achieving a comprehensive playwork research is to challenge the criticisms that appear to be dissuading the pursuit of quantitative playwork research.

First, it may be argued that the pursuit of quantification in playwork is a distraction from the delivery of effective playwork practice. If the playworker is focused on executing effective research, it is contended that this will have an adverse impact on the playwork practice at the point of delivery / field research. Although this may be conceived as a general criticism of playwork research, it might be considered to be particularly problematic for quantitative research in that this is more likely to require data collection that is detached from playwork. It is also bound up with a concern over the professionalization of playwork and the type of playwork knowledge that is valued. The concern is not that of a luddite; rather, it is grounded on the understanding that playworkers are inherently reflective practitioners (the critical-reflection, advocated by King & Newstead, 2018), and that there is no additional gain accrued through research imposed on the play act. However, quantitative research

need not compromise playwork practice; researchers need not be practising playworkers or audio-visual technology can be deployed by playworkers-as-researchers to reflect on the unadulterated playwork after the event (Sturrock and Else, 1998). On the other hand, this concern may be valid in instances where research is imposed upon playwork practitioners with an expectation that data collection is to be executed at the point of play without such additional resource.

A second objection to quantification in playwork could be raised on the grounds that ultimately numbers are never child-centred, which contradicts the premise of playwork. Quantification is imposed on play. Even when it is purported that the ultimate aim is to protect and improve children's play through evidence-based understanding, concerns might be raised that these data are collected at the behest of adults, on adults' terms and to attend to adults' agendas. This may not, however, be an intractable problem. Although quantitative research tends to be *on*, rather than *with* or even *by* children, there is no reason why more child-centred or child-driven research (quantitative and qualitative) cannot be undertaken (Qvortrup, 2015).

Third, numbers could also be viewed as being inconsistent with playwork on the grounds that they have been used as a tool to control and constrain. When playwork responds to the challenge of funders and evidences the positive impact of play in order to secure funds, safeguard services, or justify expansion, concerns might justifiably be raised that it leads to the promotion of particular types of play, to the detriment of others (Whewey, 2015). Thus, playwork that is funded to achieve desired outcomes for educational attainment, child development and child health is a playwork in which risky play is marginalised or ostracised. In effect, quantification of

positive impact for favoured forms of play constrains opportunities for some other types of play. Those who have lived the downscaling of public funding for playwork will also lament the way in which quantitative evidence has been used to undermine the case for supporting playwork (Hocker, 2014). However, it might be retorted that part of this problem is that quantitative evidence has not been used to counter these arguments. Rather than criticise quantitative evidence for the threat that it has posed, the challenge for playwork is to use it more effectively in future to support the case for play.

Concerns also extend beyond the reasons that underlie the production of quantitative knowledge. Fourth, realising the potential of the enumeration of playwork is dependent on consumers of this knowledge beyond playwork having the capacity to understand number, at least to avoid misuse and misunderstanding, or at best to ensure that this knowledge is fully exploited. There is no shortage of examples of evidence being misinterpreted or misunderstood, with regards to play as with many other fields of knowledge (Whewey, 2011). Although there is always a risk that evidence will be interpreted through the filter of prior conception, it is incumbent upon the playwork profession (or at least some within the playwork profession) to take a lead role in interpreting quantitative evidence for others as it is used to inform public debate (Dickey, Castle & Pryor, 2016). As with risky play, the response to the risk of quantitative playwork knowledge being misinterpreted is management, rather than risk avoidance (Ball, Gill & Spiegel, 2008).

The risk of misinterpretation is not only that those beyond playwork might misunderstand the evidence. Fifth, until the value of quantification is acknowledged

and promoted in playwork education and professional development, it is not unreasonable to expect that the value of quantitative playwork will not be realised by those working within the profession (Kuegel, 2017). Just as play is not the preserve of adult playworkers, so the insights provided by quantification in playwork must not be the preserve of a limited number of ‘experts’ speaking on behalf of the field. Service managers and decision-makers have deployed the power of number to justify the scaling back of purportedly ‘inefficient practice’ in playwork (Hocker, 2014); at the very least, playwork practitioners need to be able to engage and counter misguided evidence that concerns their everyday practice.

Moving on from the politics of production and consumption, there are several grounds for criticising exactly what is portrayed through the quantification of playwork. A sixth objection might be that there are essential playwork experiences that cannot be counted. Playwork often celebrates the idiosyncratic; whether playwork is used in support of mundane everyday experiences or transformative ones (Lester, 2014), its essence and impact seem beyond the reach of enumeration. In reply, it is argued that there are aspects of all playwork that *could* be enumerated. At its most elementary level, this might simply be a count of counter-cultural or idiosyncratic play in a session. Enumeration does not aim and should not purport to capture everything about playwork, but it can be utilised to provide some insight- albeit (perhaps at times superficially) about all aspects of playwork.

The objection about whether playwork can be enumerated is often a manifestation of a separate concern - that numbers dehumanise experience. It might therefore be objected that even if it is possible to enumerate playwork, it is not desirable to do so.

On the other hand, although numbers can dehumanise, the generalised knowledge of a quantified playwork (which provides a degree of helpful insight into the nature of playwork) need not imply that playwork practice is compromised. Furthermore, where enumeration is under the control of the playworker, it does not necessarily follow that the presentation of number will dehumanise.

Even if we concede that playwork can be enumerated and that these numbers may be used in service of playwork without dehumanising, there is the eighth and related concern that enumeration is reductionist. Playworkers celebrate the totality of play and the complexity or interactions of the components that comprise it. Quantification steps to a different beat, seeking to reduce totality and complexity in order to illuminate understanding of specific aspects of the whole. Although big data, complex mathematical modelling and complexity theory (Battram, 2015) could, in theory, be used to further an understanding of playwork that seems consistent with the playworker's view of their practice, the true value of enumeration in playwork may rest with the proliferation of micro-insights that arise from exploring parts of the whole. In this way, in theory, quantification could contribute to better understanding of playwork's complexity, albeit being insufficient to provide this understanding alone.

Although reductionist in approach, the knowledge goals of quantification tend toward the aggregate. This points to a ninth objection in that the search for what is shared may inadvertently marginalise the particularity that is so highly valued in playwork (Russell, 2017). It should be conceded that quantification tends to give primacy to aggregate experience, leaving it poorly placed to explore the nuance and specificities

of an individual child's play or playworker's practice. On the other hand, where the goal is to achieve an expansive knowledge through playwork research, then there need not be made a choice between aggregate or specific knowledge (quantitative or qualitative). Rather, there is value for playwork in acquiring both (Kuegel, 2017).

The power of number tends to lend an air of importance to that which is measured (Qvortrup, 2015). Inadvertently, a tenth concern should be raised in that undue focus is placed on that which is counted. Although it should be disputed that there are aspects of playwork that cannot be enumerated, the reality is that there are aspects of playwork that are more readily enumerated than others and which may, inadvertently or otherwise, be subjected to greater scrutiny. If playworkers are reticent, or unable to enumerate their playwork, then there is a risk that the numbers that matter are only those that others count. In a climate where pressures are placed on playwork services (McKendrick, Horton, Kraftl & Else, 2014), the 'numbers that count' may be operational ones that are used to constrain or curtail (staff-CYP ratios; cost of service and the like), rather than ones that illuminate practice.

Envisioning playwork research futures

To what extent is the potential of enumeration to contribute to playwork understanding one that is realised or being promoted among the leading thinkers in the field? It is prudent to reflect on two timely contributions to the debate on the

future of playwork research and then to focus attention on the Playwork Principles (PPSG, 2005) that have been embraced by those working within the sector.

In their seminal contribution to researching playwork, Pete King and Shelly Newstead (2018) conclude their edited collection by drawing attention to four areas of playwork research that mirror playwork practice and what might be considered fundamental characteristics of playwork research, i.e. rights-based, playfulness, play as a process for children, and critical reflection. cursory reflection might lead to the conclusion that these attributes position playwork research more on the qualitative side of the research continuum (Table 1), with for example, playfulness understood to be the antithesis of the robust, rigorous, objective and structured approach that we associate with quantitative research. However, as Pete King's own contribution to this collection shows (2018), quantitative research can add to our understanding in ways that are consistent with these core attributes of playwork research.

It might be argued that King and Newstead (2018) marginalise the promise of number in their agenda for playwork research. More direct criticism on the knowledge goals of quantitative research are raised by Wendy Russell, Stuart Lester and Wendy Smith in the conclusion (2017b) to their collection on practice-based research in play (2017a). Their concerns are over the impossibility of finding the certainty to which positivist research aspires and the concern that business and government fund and promote such research as it furthers their own self-interest. While they acknowledge the utility of quantitative tools when discussing how play research can influence policy (2017b), the tenor of their argument is that there is much more to be lost than gained through the pursuit of quantitative research.

In response, it is argued that the Playwork Principles (PPSG, 2005) necessitate a quantitative research agenda in order to better understand the landscape of playwork (in the UK and beyond). As Table 2 shows, there are quantitative research questions that need to be addressed for each of the eight principles. While it is not argued that this should be the only, or even the primary, agenda that is pursued, playwork needs these questions to be answered.

Understanding playwork through number

The value of enumerating playwork is not hypothetical. There are many examples of number being used to better understand playwork practice. Here, we focus on two examples of ‘critical reflection’ (King & Newstead, 2018) on the nature of the playwork profession, each of which provides an example of how playwork and playworkers can be better understood through survey research. The first case draws from *Playwork People*, four reports that were published by SkillsActive between 2003 and 2010, which aimed to profile the characteristics of the playwork workforce, and the second case contrasts the perceptions of playworkers to others who responded to the National Survey of Play, which was administered to promote the 25th anniversary of Playday in 2017.

Playwork people in numbers

Playwork People was the name given to a series of four research reports published by the Playwork Unit at SkillsActive. The objective was to generate robust and reliable information about the playwork workforce in England in order to achieve the secondary objective of increasing the profile of play and the playwork sector. Surveys were administered with employers and employees. Without a central database of playworkers or employers, a range of strategies were used to reach out to potential respondents including distribution at events for playworkers and distribution by e-mail and post to those on the databases of Regional Centres for Playwork Education and Training. Snowballing was used to further extend the reach of the research.

Although the aim was to reach as many as possible, without a central register, it is not possible to ascertain the extent to which the respondent profile is representative of the sector as a whole. Similarly, as respondents self-select on the basis of their identity as a playworker, included in the survey population are some who may not be considered by all to be playworkers, e.g. uniformed group leaders and leisure workers are among those who responded. Not all playworkers would identify these adults who work with children as being playworkers.

Notwithstanding the uncertainties that may surround the survey population, the four *Playwork People* surveys generated much useful insight in a wide range of pertinent issues for playwork. The final report (*Playwork People 4*) was based on 575 surveys from individual playworkers and 200 surveys from playwork employers. Six main themes were covered, i.e. characteristics of the playwork workforce, characteristics of playwork organisations, skills needs and gaps, training and development, qualifications, and recruitment and retention. Multiple issues were enumerated for each of these themes. For example, the playwork workforce was profiled in terms of

gender (86% women), ethnic origin (88% white), disability (6% disabled), union membership (17% members), occupational profile (e.g. 28% playworkers, 21% senior playworkers, 4% play assistants), hours worked (82% working part-time), remuneration (average salary [in 2010] of £8.76), whether they had second jobs (55% had a second job), age of children with which worked (78% with 4-5 years olds, 83% with 6- 7 year olds, 88% with 8-12 year olds and 28% with teenagers) and length of employment (e.g. more than 40% having worked in the sector for more than ten years). Better understanding the playwork workforce is a useful end goal in its own right and raises questions about pathways into the profession. It would be interesting post-austerity to revisit this profiling to ascertain the impact of austerity on the profile of contemporary playworkers.

Equally interesting was play managers' perceptions of the skills profile of their playwork employees. When asked to evaluate the importance of 21 skills on a four point Likert scale (very, fairly, not very, not at all important), it was found that generic skills were most highly valued with 95% considering communication skills to be very important and 91% thinking likewise for team working. Interestingly, although the vast majority also considered them to be very important skills for playworkers, more employers considered it very important to have awareness of child protection (89%) than knowledge of playwork values and principles (75%). Equally significant in the context of this chapter was that only 37% considered it very important that their playwork employees have reading and writing skills, with only 24% considering it 'very important' that they have numeracy skills. Indeed, although a further 51% of employees considered it 'quite important' that their playworkers had

numeracy, 25% were of the opinion that this was either ‘not very important’ or ‘not at all important’.

The skill set that employers think that playworkers should have is of heightened significance when consideration is given to the findings for perceptions of skills that they are thought to possess; only 15% of employers considered that their playworkers were ‘fully equipped’ for their work. One-half (50%) were considered to have ‘some of the skills but need development’, with the bulk of the remainder (32%) appraised as ‘having most of the skills, but need some for development’. The vast majority (88%) were also considered to lack skills specific to playwork at the point of recruitment. Figure 1 describes the specific skills that were considered to be lacking in the current workforce (among those who indicated that skills were lacking). Of concern was that the skill considered to be most lacking was knowledge of playwork values and principles (57%).

As with any data, Playwork People necessitates careful and critical reflection. If the findings are taken as presented, challenging issues arise for the profession. For example, to what extent is their discord between playwork managers and playworkers when it comes to judging the relative importance of child protection and playwork principles? If the vast majority entering the profession have a skills deficit, how can playwork training deliver what is required? To what extent has austerity altered the profile of playwork people in the years since that last survey in 2010? However, it is important that these findings are not accepted as simple and unproblematic facts; rather, they should be critically appraised as representations of reality. It would be instructive to reflect on who represented playworkers and play managers through the

Playwork People surveys (and the impact that this might have on the narrative presented). Similarly, it is lamentable that nearly ten years on, playwork is no better placed to pursue a more conventional probability-based approach to sampling those practising playwork. Thus, while there is value to be gleaned from surveys of this ilk, it requires playwork intelligence and critical reflection to deliver a useful return from such research.

Are playworkers different?

To promote the 25th anniversary of *Playday*, the national celebration of children's play in the UK (Conway, 2014), the four national play organisations commissioned a nationwide survey with a twenty-five year focus in order to compare contemporary play with play of yesteryear. As with *Playwork People*, a range of strategies were used to reach out to respondents including using the social media platforms and contacts of play organisations, and adding posts to popular sites used by parents, such as MumsNet. Snowballing was encouraged. Almost 3000 online surveys were completed. Almost 1800 answered the question in which they were asked to identify whether they were a playworker (274 respondents), someone who worked with children but was not a playworker (889), or someone who did not work with children (595). Although no certainty can be attached to whether the survey sub-populations are representative of the broader populations of which they are part, the survey returns afford the opportunity to explore the extent to which playworkers view play differently to others. For the purpose of this paper, we focus on perceptions of contemporary play (Tables 3 and 4).

What is immediately apparent is that those who work with children (whether or not playworkers) are more likely than those who are not to be able to express an opinion on the nature of play today (Table 3). For example, whereas almost one third of those who do not work with children were unsure of the amount of time children typically spent playing outdoors in winter (32%), little more than one in ten playworkers were unsure (12%). Whether we consider that playworkers' opinions are better informed by expert knowledge and experience, or merely that playworkers are more confident at expressing opinion on these matters, it is clear that playworkers (in common with others who work with children) are more likely to contribute with evidence to contemporary debates on play. As advocates of play, this affords opportunity to further the 'rights based approach' to playwork research desired by King and Newstead (2018).

Not only are more playworkers able to express an opinion on contemporary play, in many ways their views on contemporary play differ to others who work with children and, particularly, to those who do not work with children (Table 4). Interestingly, playworkers are both more likely than others to perceive that children have a wider range of play opportunities, but also that there is a wider range of factors that are restricting where and when children play. For example, almost one-half of playworkers perceive that today's children have opportunities to ride a bike (45%), which is significantly more than the one third of others who work with children (37%) or one quarter of those who do not (27%). Similarly, twice as many playworkers compared to those who do not work with children are of the opinion that 'neighbours complaining about play' is a factor that is contributing toward restrictions on where children play (38%, compared to 16%, respectively). Although holding not so

different opinions on other aspects of play, it is also significant that playworkers are more likely than those who do not work with children to consider that today's children perceive playgrounds to be dangerous and to express lower levels of overall satisfaction with children's play.

This evidence can be utilised in different ways by playwork and playworkers.

Although it is clear that not all playworkers share the same experience or understanding of contemporary play, it is equally clear that – as a whole – there are significant differences of opinion between playworkers and the wider population. It is therefore critically important that playworkers' voices are heard in wider debates on the nature of play. First and foremost, this is playwork's responsibility to ensure that wider debates on play are fully informed by the realities that they encounter (and not mis-informed by others). However, it is also important for the profession. Playwork will not be advanced until its practitioners see that there are some among its number who are regarded by the wider public as authorities on matters pertaining to play.

Conclusion: A quantitative research agenda for playwork

Those from the more radical traditions of playwork might be expected to be comfortable living in an era when traditional authorities are being questioned and held to account. However, this also brings heightened insularity and an exaggeration of difference, which may be less palatable. This brings growing concerns for protection from perceived threats, and greater comfort to be found in a 'back to basics' common sense approach to life, which are not necessarily conducive to furthering the richness of play that playworkers are keen to promote. It is also an era when evidence is

routinely questioned not only on the grounds of quality, but also according to whether it supports the worldview of the beholder. In some respects, this is not the time to be promoting the enumeration of playwork.

On the other hand, playwork needs enumerating. The portrayal of playwork people in the SkillsActive surveys of the first decade in the 21st Century raised many questions about the playwork workforce at the time; the downsizing and reshaping of the sector through austerity raises the question of whether the same challenges exist today.

Similarly, the evidence from the more recent National Playday Survey of 2017, which demonstrated that playworkers think differently about some – but not all – aspects of contemporary play raises questions about who speaks on behalf of play and the need for playworkers to be mindful to the often different views of those who do not share their playwork traditions. There is much that remains to be addressed. There is a need to better understand the way in which the Playwork Principles (PPSG, 2005) that are core to playwork practice are being operationalized in practice. In addition to the critical reflection through the medium of number and the potential for using such evidence to promote a ‘rights-based’ approach that these surveys facilitate – and to return to the wider challenge set by King and Newstead (2018) - this chapter has also demonstrated through the Playwork Principles (PPSG, 2005) and counter-critiques to quantification that enumeration will enrich understanding of playfulness and the play process.

Of course, it is not as simple as ‘just do it’. It must be demonstrated that the pursuit of an enumerated playwork is not at the expense of the primary goal of facilitating the play process. As has been suggested in this chapter, whether it is through surveys of

playworkers that canvass opinion and experience, or after-the-event analysis of playwork practice that is not encumbered by simultaneous data collection, this need not be compromised. More importantly, quantitative research must be robust in order to be useful. There is a skill-set that has to be acquired. The scaling back of play and playwork-focused degrees in Higher Education, with the withdrawal of provision Gloucestershire and the shift from specialist playwork degrees to ones with a broader childhood studies focus in which play is but a part at Northumbria and Leeds Beckett is not helpful in developing the pool of talent that is competent to undertake this type of research. If playwork employers are to be believed (Figure 1), there is no appetite for numeracy in the playworker skill-set. The challenge is significant, but the potential gains for playwork are considerable. Steps need to be taken in order that playwork can count on number for the advancement of the sector in the years ahead.

References

- Adams, J. S. (2014). The quantitative revolution in urban geography. In B.J.L. Berry & James O. Wheeler (Eds.) *Urban Geography in America, 1950-2000. Paradigms and Personalities*. (pp. 115-126). London: Routledge.
- Ball, D. J., Gill, T., & Spiegel, B. (2008). *Managing risk in play provision: implementation guide*. London: The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).
- Barlow, M. (2017) *Discovering maths through play*. Pre-school Learning Alliance.
- Batram, A. (2015). Strategic playwork’: a possibility that is neither ‘intervention playwork’ nor ‘environmental playwork. *International Journal of Play*, 4(3), 285-290.

- Brennan, H.S. (2018). Researching children's play as a playworker-ethnographer. In P. King. & S. Newstead (Eds.), *Researching play from a playwork perspective* (pp. 56-72). London: Routledge.
- City & Guilds (no date) *Playwork (4984)*.
<https://www.cityandguilds.com/qualifications-and-apprenticeships/children/playwork/4964-playwork#tab=information> (Accessed 26 June 2019).
- Cole-Hamilton, I., Harrop, A., & Street, C. (2002). *Making the case for play: Gathering the evidence*. London: National Children's Bureau Enterprises Ltd.
- Cole-Hamilton, (2012). *Getting it right for play. The power of play: an evidence base*. Pentlandfield: Play Scotland.
- Conway, M. (2014), The Thin of it – Surviving and Thriving in Austerity. *Journal of Playwork Practice* 1: 87-91.
- Department of Culture, Media and Sport (2004) *Getting serious about play: a review of children's play (the Dobson report)*. London: DCMS.
- Dickey, K., Castle, K., & Pryor, K. (2016). Reclaiming play in schools. *Childhood Education*, 92(2), 111-117.
- Hocker, P. (2014). A play space to beat all. *Journal of Playwork Practice*, 1(1), 104-108.
- Houlder, V. (2016) Public opinion brings shift in business attitudes to tax planning. *Financial Times*. August 29th.
- Hughes, B. (1996). *A playworker's taxonomy of play types*. London: PlayLink.
- Hughes, B. (2002). *A playworker's taxonomy of play types* (2nd ed.). London: PlayLink.
- King, P. (2018). Process, participation and reflection: how playwork practice

- influenced a mixed-methods approach to researching children's perception of choice in their play. In P. King. & S. Newstead (Eds.), *Researching play from a playwork perspective* (pp. 90-108). London: Routledge.
- King, P. & Newstead, S. Eds. (2018). *Researching play from a playwork perspective*. London: Routledge.
- King, P. & Sturrock, G. (2019) *The Play Cycle: Theory, Research and Application*. London: Routledge.
- Kuegel, C. (2017). Research methodology: What do we 'know' about research and why do we know it?. *Journal of Playwork Practice*, 4(1), 59-61.
- Lester, S. (2014). Play as protest: Clandestine moments of disturbance and hope. In C. Burke and K. Jones (Eds.) *Education, Childhood and Anarchism. Talking Colin Ward* (pp. 224-234). Routledge.
- Lohr, S. (2012). The age of big data. *New York Times*, 11.
- Lowe, R.(1995) The rediscovery of poverty and the creation of the child poverty action group, 1962–68, *Contemporary Record*, 9:3, 602-611
- McKendrick, J.H., Horton, J., Kraftl, P., & Else, P. (2014). Bursting the bubble or opening the door? Appraising the impact of austerity on playwork and playwork practitioners in the UK. *Journal of Playwork Practice*, 1, 61-69.
- McKendrick, J. H., Kraftl, P., Mills, S., Gregorius, S., & Sykes, G. (2015). Complex geographies of play provision dis/investment across the UK. *International Journal of Play*, 4(3); 228-235.
- Montgomery, K. (2015). Children's media culture in a big data world. *Journal of Children and Media*, 9(2), 266-271.
- Philo, C. (2018). More words, more worlds: reflections on the 'cultural turn' and human geography. In S. Naylor, J. Ryan, I Cook, & D. Crouch (Eds.) *Cultural*

turns/geographical turns: Perspectives on cultural geography, (pp. 26-53).

London: Routledge.

Play Scotland (no date) *Free to Play. Information Leaflet*. Pentlandfield: Play Scotland. <https://www.playscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/assets/PS-Info-leaflet.pdf> (Accessed 27 June 2019)

Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group (20105) *The Playwork Principles: an overview*. Cardiff..

Qvortrup, J. (2015). A voice for children in statistical and social accounting: A plea for children's right to be heard. In A. James and A. Prout (Eds.) *Constructing and reconstructing childhood: Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood (Routledge Education Classic Edition)*. (pp. 74-93). Routledge.

Richardson, G.R. (no date) *Open up to outdoor mathematics*. Brighton: Learning Through Landscapes. <file:///Users/johnmckendrick/Downloads/ltl-maths-early-years-booklet-final1432742138.pdf> (Accessed 27 June 2019)

Russ, S. W. (1998). Play, creativity, and adaptive functioning: Implications for play interventions. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, 27(4), 469-480.

Russell, W. (2017). Nomadic wonderings on playwork research: putting a dialectical and ethnographic methodology to work again. In P. King and S. Newstead (Eds.) *Researching Play from a Playwork Perspective* (pp. 55-71). London. Routledge.

Russell, W., Lester, S. & Smith, H. Eds. (2017a). *Practice-based research in children's play*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Russell, W., Lester, S. & Smith, H. Eds. (2017b). What do we want research in children's play to do? In W. Russell, S. Lester & H. Smith (Eds.). *Practice-based research in children's play*. (245-263) Bristol: Policy Press.

Practice-based research in children's play. Bristol: Policy Press.

Sturrock, G. (2019) Politics, playwork and neoliberalism. *The Playwork Pamphlets*

Number 1. London: The Playwork Foundation.

<https://playworkfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Pamphlet-1a.pdf>

(Accessed 27 June 2019)

Sturrock, G. & Else, P. (1998). 'The Colorado Paper' – The playground as therapeutic

space: Playwork as healing. In G. Sturrock & P. Else (Eds.) (2007),

Therapeutic playwork reader one 1995–2000 (pp. 73–104). Eastleigh,

Hampshire: Common Threads

Waters, P. (2018). Playing at research: playfulness as a form of knowing and being in

research with children. In P. King. & S. Newstead (Eds.), *Researching play*

from a playwork perspective (pp. 73-89). London: Routledge.

Wheway, R. (2011). *Urban myths about children's playgrounds*. Coventry:

Children's Play Advisory Service.

Wheway, R. (2015). Opportunities for free play. *International Journal of Play*, 4(3),

270-274.

[http://childrensplayadvisoryservice.org.uk/pdf_files/Publications/Urban%20m](http://childrensplayadvisoryservice.org.uk/pdf_files/Publications/Urban%20myths%20about%20children%27s%20playgrounds.pdf)

[yths%20about%20children%27s%20playgrounds.pdf](http://childrensplayadvisoryservice.org.uk/pdf_files/Publications/Urban%20myths%20about%20children%27s%20playgrounds.pdf). (Accessed 13

September 2019)

Table 1: Dichotomous profiling of quantitative and qualitative research

Dimension	Quantitative research	Qualitative research
General Nature	Seek precise measurement	Seek in-depth description
Purpose	To determine patterns To examine cause and effect	To explore the essence To understand underlying motivations
Sample size	Large numbers	Small numbers
Sample character	Representative of whole population	Not necessarily representative, often exploring outliers
Approach to data collection	Structured	Unstructured
Type of data	Number (statistical analysis)	Words (narrative)
Design	Designed in advance of data collection	Flexible, can evolve during study
Breadth of study	Narrow, on specific issues	Flexible, can evolve during study
Typical methods	Questionnaires with fixed options, Structured observations Systematic content analysis of documents	Interviews, Unstructured observations, Narrative analysis of documents
Approach of researcher	Aspires to objectivity	May embrace position and status – no fear of subjectivity

Role of participant	Provide data	May extend beyond providing data in more participatory forms of research
Approach to theory	Test theory (deductive research)	Generate theory (inductive research)
Presentation of results	Statistics, tables, charts	Text extracts, participant generated outputs (drawings, images)

Table 2: Enumerating the Playwork Principles

Playwork Principle	Indicative Example of the Need for Number
<p>All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate.</p> <p>Play is a biological, psychological and social necessity, and is fundamental to the healthy development and well being of individuals and communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What proportion of CYP exhibit playful behaviour in situations that are not associated with play , e.g. at funerals, at the dinner table, in formal learning – <i>(is there an innate impulse to play?)</i> • Are there variations among CYP in the above, e.g. among CYP of different ages, perhaps stratified by gender – <i>(do all CYP need to play?)</i> • Are higher levels of wellbeing expressed in communities in which play is more prevalent in the public realm – <i>(is play fundamental to wellbeing?)</i>
<p>Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What proportion of playground play is directed by adult carers – <i>(how much of what is understood as play meets the conditions of being freely chosen, intrinsically motivated and personally directed?)</i>

<p>The prime focus and essence of playwork is to support and facilitate the play process and this should inform the development of play policy, strategy, training and education.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What proportion of a playworker’s labour is given over to supporting and facilitating the play process? – <i>(to what extent are ‘other’ demands on playworker’s time compromising the ability of the playworker to deliver the prime focus of playwork?)</i> • What proportion of local playworkers were consulted in the development of a local play policy – <i>(is the goal of practice being used to inform development being realized locally?)</i>
<p>For playworkers, the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What proportion of a playworkers report instances when the play process has not taken precedence? – <i>(to what extent are ‘other’ demands on playworkers compromising their commitment to facilitate the play process?)</i> • To what extent and in what ways - have playworkers actively engaged in advocating for play beyond the play profession – <i>(are playworkers also acting as play advocates?)</i>
<p>The role of the playworker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What proportion of playworkers report instances when the play process has not taken precedence? – <i>(to what extent are ‘other’ demands on playworkers compromising their commitment to facilitate the play process?)</i> • To what extent and in what ways - have playworkers actively engaged in advocating for play beyond the play profession – <i>(are playworkers also acting as play advocates?)</i>

<p>The playworker's response to children and young people playing is based on a sound up to date knowledge of the play process, and reflective practice.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does (i) the profile of CYP initiating play through a play cue differ across settings, and (ii) to what extent has this changed since the last time this aspect of the play process was profiled? – <i>(what is the current nature of the play process and is this changing?)</i> • How quickly, and in what ways, do different types of playworker respond to the play cue presented by CYP, and (ii) to what extent has this changed since the last time this aspect of playworker practice process was profiled? – <i>(what is the current nature of the playworker practice and is this changing?)</i>
<p>Playworkers recognise their own impact on the play space and also the impact of children and young people's play on the playworker.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What proportion of positive, negative and neutral impact do playworkers perceive that they their organization of the play space has on CYP's play? – <i>(playworker's recognize their impact on the play space?)</i> • What proportion of playworkers end a session feeling disappointed at the nature of CYP's play? – <i>(what impact do CYP have on the playworker?)</i>
<p>Playworkers choose an intervention style that enables children and young people to extend their play. All playworker intervention must balance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How frequently do playworkers use intervention styles X, Y and Z in their play sessions? – <i>(playworker's adoption of intervention styles?)</i> • What proportion of playworkers report children embracing [different types of] risk [emotional, physical, etc] without encountering immediate negative harm in the play session? – <i>(need to balance risk for developmental benefit and well being?)</i>

risk with the developmental benefit and well being of children.	
--	--

Table 3: Uncertainty about contemporary play; playworker, others working with children and those not working with children compared

Issue	<i>Percentage who don't know</i>		
	Playworkers	Others working with children	Not working with children
Where do children play?	1.4%	1.1%	7.4%
Where outdoors do children play?	2.1%	2.9%	10.7%
How much play is screen-based?	1.4%	0.8%	10.1%
Gender-character of toys	6.3%	7.4%	21.5%
Play partners	11.2%	9.5%	25.1%
What types of play opportunities do children have (list)?	8.0%	6.5%	7.2%
How often do children play outdoors, school day, winter?	12.3%	15.4%	32.1%
How often do children play outdoors, school day, summer?	13.8%	14.7%	31.6%
How often do children play outdoors, weekends?	16.5%	16.7%	31.6%
How often do children play outdoors, school holidays?	14.6%	16.2%	30.6%
How dangerous do children perceive playgrounds?	4.2%	3.7%	13.3%
How satisfied are you with opportunities for play?	1.4%	3.2%	11.2%

Source: 2017 National Survey of Play for Playday

Table 4: Perceptions of contemporary play; playworker, others working with children and those not working with children compared

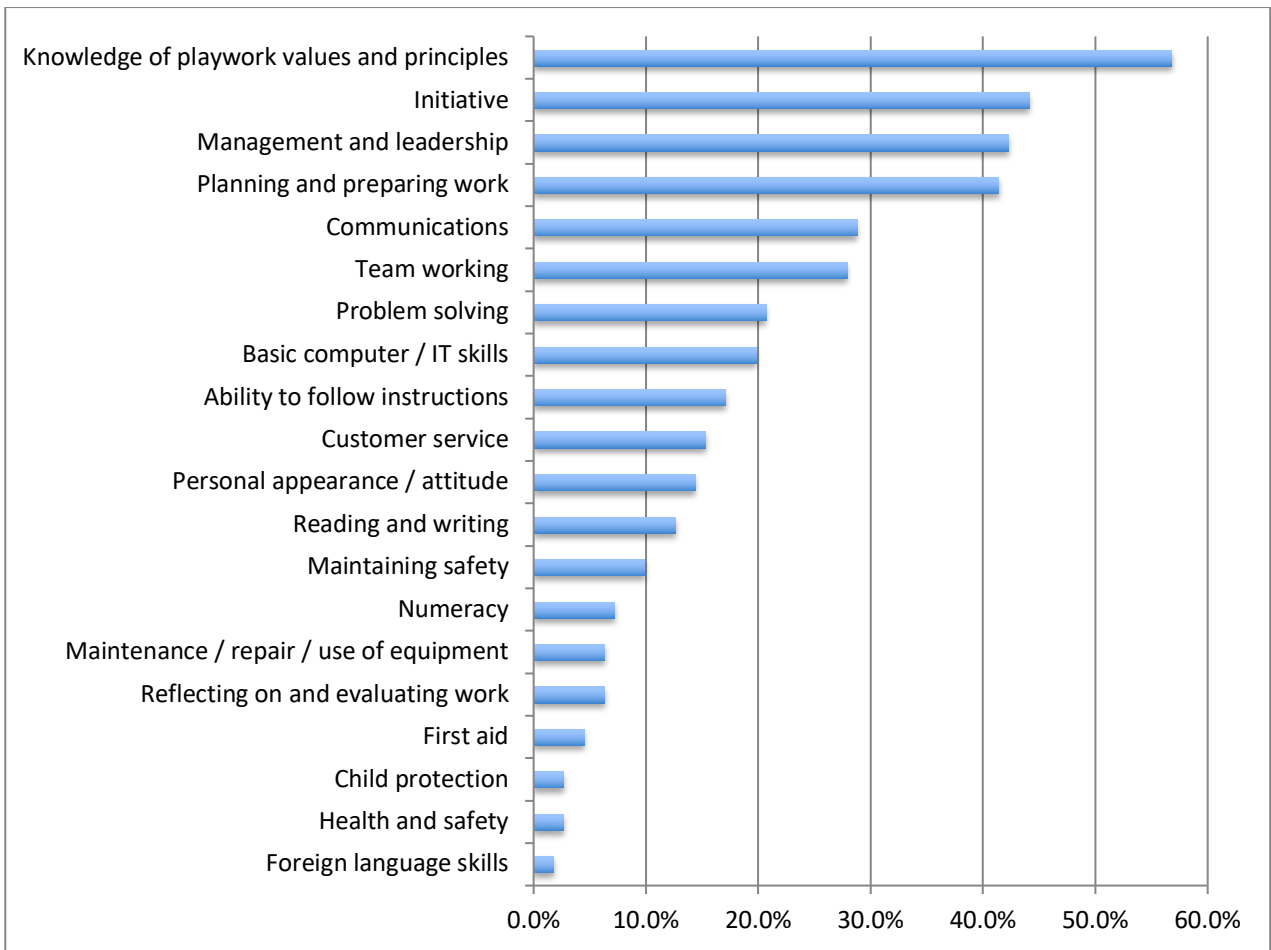
Issue <i>Specific example</i>	Statistically significant difference	<i>Percentages</i>		
		Playworkers	Others working with children	Not working with children
Play Opportunities Today				
Ride a bike	*	44.9%	36.8%	26.7%
Skip	*	33.2%	25.2%	18.2%
Hula Hoop	*	28.8%	20.4%	14.5%
Skate	*	29.2%	19.1%	18.2%
Play large-sided game of football in neighbourhood	*	17.9%	13.3%	11.8%
Play (other) large-sided game in neighbourhood		13.1%	9.0%	8.1%
Factors that Restrict Where and When Children Play				
Parent/guardian rules about where children play	*	47.4%	36.6%	26.4%
Parent/guardian rules about when children play	*	43.1%	31.9%	23.7%
Parent/guardian rules about who children play with	*	39.8%	29.4%	21.5%
Parent/guardian insisting homework comes first	*	34.7%	23.8%	18.3%
Neighbours complaining about play	*	38.0%	26.7%	15.6%
Child not wanting to play out in 'bad weather'	*	37.6%	32.5%	20.3%
Child not wanting to play out in the dark	*	31.4%	26.2%	16.1%
Child not wanting to play out in case they get dirty	*	29.2%	19.9%	9.1%

Having nowhere to play	*	29.9%	21.0%	14.1%
Having nothing to do	*	28.5%	21.8%	13.8%
Having nobody to play with	*	28.5%	20.1%	12.9%
Being aware of dangers from unknown adults	*	40.1%	31.8%	21.7%
Being scared of other children	*	23.4%	16.8%	10.6%
Traffic	*	40.1%	30.5%	21.7%
Local news about dangers to children	*	30.3%	21.7%	14.8%
National news about dangers to children	*	30.3%	23.5%	15.6%
Crime/anti-social behaviour in the neighbourhood	*	31.0%	25.2%	13.9%
Where Children Play				
More outdoor than indoor		10.0%	5.1%	2.3%
Equally indoor and outdoor		3.6%	4.3%	6.3%
More indoor than outdoor		86.4%	90.6%	90.4%
How Much Play is Screen Based?				
Most		34.8%	37.8%	30.2%
A lot		58.9%	58.5%	66.3%
Less than 'a lot'		6.4%	3.8%	3.6%
How Much Play is Screen Based?				
Most		34.8%	37.8%	30.2%
A lot		58.9%	58.5%	66.3%
Less than 'a lot'		6.4%	3.8%	3.6%
Gender Composition of Play Friends				
Only same gender		11.7%	12.9%	12.5%
Mainly same gender		38.3%	38.8%	38.2%

Equal gender mix		50.0%	48.3%	49.3%
Typical play time three or more hours				
School day, winter		8.3%	3.7%	6.2%
School day, summer		26.1%	22.5%	15.7%
Weekends		43.1%	42.1%	55.4%
School holidays		55.2%	51.7%	63.0%
How dangerous to children perceive playgrounds?				
Very/quite dangerous		33.6%	39.5%	21.5%
Little/not at all dangerous	*	66.5%	60.5%	78.5%
Satisfaction with play opportunities today?				
Very/quite satisfied		17.1%	20.2%	28.9%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	*	22.0%	19.3%	22.3%
Very/quite dissatisfied		60.9%	60.5%	48.8%

Source: 2017 National Survey of Play for Playday

Figure 1: Skills deficit of playworkers: perceptions of playwork employers where skills gaps are identified



Source: Skills Active (2010), Playwork People 4, Figure 4.5, p.18