

THE PLAYWORK MATRIX

This paper should be read in conjunction with the 'A Personal List Of Events And Evolving Understanding That Have Led Playwork To Where It Is Today' and 'A New Playwork Perspective'

The matrix is intended as a tool that will help us test whether the elements and categories in the proposed Playwork Principles are in fact useful and meaningful in exploration of a playwork perspective.

They provide a tool that allows us to continue whether elements and categories make sense in the context of the Playwork Principles, or whether this re-working is a dead end or red herring.

It is not intended as a definitive model, and the subsequent examples given are only meant as experimental attempts to complete the matrix as a starting point for discussion.

THE PLAYWORK MATRIX.

| Elements → | Evolution how we became what we are | Emotion how we feel | Identity how we know who we are | Environment how we know where we are |
|--|---|--|---|--|
| Categories ↓ | | | | |
| Science: study of phenomena, cause and effect | Evolutionary biology, genetics | Psychology, anatomy, physiology | Psychology, anthropology, history | Ecology, archaeology, astronomy |
| Art: symbolic expression of thought | Development and use of symbols | Creative arts, spirituality | Playing out internal material, myth | Aesthetic response to awe and wonder |
| Technology: application of science and knowledge | Development and use of tools | Empathy, negotiation, reflection from others | Transmission of culture, ritual, norms | Exploration, adaptation of and to the ecology |
| Philosophy, metaphysics: inquiry into the nature of ultimate reality | Why am I here? | Why do I feel what I feel? | Who am I? | Where am I? |
| | The moral dimension - fairness and justice? | | | |

The matrix (and its examples) is an attempt to relate the four elements and four categories initially identified by the working group, so that where elements intersect with categories, statements relating to the playing child and to the playworker can be inserted.

It became clear during these experimental attempts that there are very fuzzy boundaries between the elements, categories and their intersections, and many of the experimental statements are almost certainly in the wrong places in the matrix.

Because we agreed we couldn't make definitive statements about what the playing child might be doing, feeling, thinking or experiencing in their play, we used the formulation 'the child may be' as a kind of health warning about the content of any particular statement under this side of the matrix.

And although we use the formulation 'the playworker ought to' on that side of the matrix, the statements are only a very tentative description of how they 'ought to' respond to the playing child, though mainly drawn from the self assessment framework in THE FIRST CLAIM.

We were also very conscious that whatever the re-worked assumptions and values looked like after the consultation exercise, and subsequently gained some acceptance in the field in Wales or elsewhere, this would have massive implications for playwork practice on the ground, the description of the job, and the content of playwork training and education at all levels.

Our hope is that the playwork field will consider the proposal and test it to destruction if necessary, so that improved formulations of a playwork perspective can be developed by the field and for the field, in the interests of the playing child.

Example of a matrix related to 'the first claim' basic framework and definitions.

| Evolution how we became what we are | Emotion how we feel | Identity how we know who we are | Environment how we know where we are | ← Elements → | Evolution how we became what we are | Emotion how we feel | Identity how we know who we are | Environment how we know where we are |
|--|---|--|---|---|--|--|---|---|
| As the playworker we ought to: | | | | Categories ↓ | The child may be: | | | |
| Leave the content or intent to the child | Resist organising the play | Let the child decide why they play | Stay out of the child's play frame unless invited into it | | Science: study of phenomena, cause and effect | Exploring fire, water, air, earth | Immersed in and focussed on their play | Exploring changes in their identity |
| Allow the development of symbolic repertoires | Be alert to expression of feelings | Be clear about our own role and identity | Enable a wide range of choices and responses | Art: symbolic expression of thought | Acquiring language and other symbolic repertoires | Expressing feelings through artefacts or actions | Acting out different identities | Creating 'maps' of their world |
| Allow for trial and error, enable uninterrupted play | Enable children to explore their own values | Enable identities to be explored | Provide the props and tools needed by the child | Technology: application of science and knowledge | Applying and testing tools, knowledge, assessing risks | Creating artefacts to express feelings | Using tools, materials, senses to create their identity | Manipulating found tools and materials |
| Think about the role of developmental processes | Think about our own strong feelings e.g. about risk | Be aware of our role in the child's play space | Enable the child to improve their own performance | Philosophy, metaphysics: inquiry into the nature of ultimate reality | Thinking abstractly about the world | Lost in thought, having strong feelings | Thinking about archetypes - gods, giants, princesses, superheroes | Thinking about alternatives and new experiences |

Example of a matrix in the context of a child digging a hole.

| Evolution how we became what we are | Emotion how we feel | Identity how we know who we are | Environment how we know where we are | ← Elements → | Evolution how we became what we are | Emotion how we feel | Identity how we know who we are | Environment how we know where we are |
|--|------------------------------------|---|--|---|--|--|---|--|
| As the playworker we ought to: | | | | Categories ↓ | The child may be: | | | |
| Leave the content or intent to the child | Resist organising the play | Be objective in relation to the play of the child | Stay out of the play frame unless invited | Science: study of phenomena, cause and effect | Seeing what happens when they dig a hole | Extending their range of repertoires | Exploring their ability to change the landscape | Finding out what or who is under the earth |
| Allow development of symbolic repertoires | Be alert to expression of feelings | Be clear about our own role and identity | Enable a wide range of choices and responses | Art: symbolic expression of thought | Creating symbols: a mine, grave, well, river, garden | Playing out internal material - sadness, rage, joy etc | Acting out being a miner, grave-digger, archaeologist | Making a mark on their world |
| Allow for trial and error, enable uninterrupted play | Provide the tools and props needed | Enable identities to be explored | Enable children to explore their own values | Technology: application of science and knowledge | Testing the tools used. | Using tools that make them feel powerful | Using tools to explore possible identities | Manipulating found tools and materials |
| Think about the role of developmental processes | Think about our own feelings | Be aware of our role in the play space | Enable children to improve their own performance | Philosophy, metaphysics: inquiry into the nature of ultimate reality | Thinking abstractly about roots, plants, growth, death | Thinking about dead people, pets | Thinking about life, human origins etc | Thinking about what's below the earth - 'worms to Australia' |

Example of a matrix in the context of a child showing apparently repetitive and restricted play behaviours.

| Evolution how we became what we are | Emotion how we feel | Identity how we know who we are | Environment how we know where we are | ← Elements → | Evolution how we became what we are | Emotion how we feel | Identity how we know who we are | Environment how we know where we are |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--|--|
| As the playworker we ought to: | | | | Categories ↓ | The child may be: | | | |
| Examine any similar processes in their own life | Examine any subjective anxiety about the child | Be objective in relation to the play of the child | Understand the child's need to work through play type(s) | | Science: study of phenomena, cause and effect | Playing out developmental processes | Staying in a safe repertoire | Working through or towards an identity |
| Be aware of the depth of a 'restricted' symbolic expression | Resist imposing our subjectivity | Be alert to play cues, respond as needed by the child | Enable the range of responses to grow as needed | Art: symbolic expression of thought | Using their available symbolic expression | Keeping it 'small and safe' for now | Acting out ideas of self | Using very small scale responses |
| Be aware of our need to test and explore | Contain any subjective anxiety | Enable identities to be explored | Ensure a rich environment is available to the child | Technology: application of science and knowledge | Using and testing the available tools | Using tools that feel safe | Using tools to explore possible identities | Learning and exploring through revisiting practice |
| Think about the role of these processes | Think about any anxiety and why we have it | Think about our own internal material | Think about why the play frame seems 'restricted' | Philosophy, metaphysics: inquiry into the nature of ultimate reality | Repeating questions and understandings about reality | Dealing with powerful feelings | Working out who they are by playing out internal material | Examining a restricted environment as part of deeper thought |

Example of a matrix in the context of a child looking at the stars.

| Evolution how we became what we are | Emotion how we feel | Identity how we know who we are | Environment how we know where we are | ← Elements → | Evolution how we became what we are | Emotion how we feel | Identity how we know who we are | Environment how we know where we are |
|--|--|---|---|---|--|---|--|--|
| As the playworker we ought to: | | | | Categories | The child may be: | | | |
| | | | | ↓ | | | | |
| Leave the content or intent to the child | Resist organising the play | Be objective in relation to the play of the child | Stay out of the play frame unless invited | Science: study of phenomena, cause and effect | Testing acquired knowledge against observation | Feeling very small or even frightened | Working through or towards an identity | Creating the name, house, street.... planet, galaxy etc sequence |
| Allow development of symbolic repertoires | Be alert to expression of feelings | Be alert to play cues, our own role and identity | Enable a wide range of choices and responses | Art: symbolic expression of thought | Developing symbolic expression | Expressing awe and wonder through art | Imagining being an astronaut, alien etc | Acting being a rocket, meteorite, alien etc |
| Allow for trial and error, enable uninterrupted play | Provide the props and tools needed | Enable identities to be explored | Enable children to explore their own values | Technology: application of science and knowledge | Using and testing the available tools | Wishing they had a telescope or binoculars | Using tools, senses to create identity | Using the telescope to spy on the neighbours |
| Think about the role of developmental processes | Think about our own feelings in relation to the cosmos | Be aware of our role in the play space | Enable the child to improve their own performance | Philosophy, metaphysics: inquiry into the nature of ultimate reality | Thinking abstractly about the cosmos | Wondering if other people live in the stars | Thinking about life, aliens, human origins etc | Thinking about earth's place in the universe |

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