

Playing it safe? Staff and young people's views about play opportunities in residential care

Practitioner review

The paper adds to the body of knowledge in this area. While it is not entirely novel, it clarifies much of the general feeling within residential child care about outdoor activities. By researching this area with proper ethical guidelines and asking a wide range of questions in a variety of units, it consolidates much of what we suppose to be true. At the present time my own unit is experiencing some of the issues raised with activities, risk assessments and budgetary constraints. Indeed there was a sense of *déjà vu*, as I heard some of the same comments echoed in my own unit in the last week. This contributed to the sense that the paper 'rings true' for me and I am sure it would also do so for the staff team at my place of work. In terms of the writing style, I found the paper to be extremely accessible. I particularly liked the way it represented the views of young people in a way that is starting to become more common in residential child care but which can still be overlooked in research.

The key points that I would take from the paper into my work place were the issues it raised about policy. Often in my own experience, policy is quoted by staff who have no idea where it originated from. I feel strongly that we need to actually see and read the policies if we have them, and find out *why* we cannot act in a sensible and spontaneous way with our young people. If we find that these policies do not actually exist, we have to ignore the hearsay. If they do exist, we can then challenge them.

I did not find any of the paper to be confusing. It was easy to read and contained confirmation that practitioners in our unit are experiencing similar issues to others. I think the paper could perhaps have cited more theoretical background and mentioned the idea of resilience in order to underline the fundamental nature of mastering new skills, particularly those skills involved in outdoor pursuits. I also accept, however, that too much theory can alienate some staff. Therefore by keeping this aspect to a minimum, the paper was made more accessible.

The paper can have a positive impact on practice by encouraging us to examine our attitudes towards young people and explore whether we are child-centred or 'us-

centred', (that is, whether we take the easiest course of action for us, or the best for the child). Also crucially as mentioned we *must* examine those policies which supposedly guide our work and find out whether they are actually there. We should not assume that what we are told is correct and therefore limit our ability to offer the widest possible range of activities to our young people.

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