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 Empirical ¹

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Supervisor:	<input type="text" value="John Rawlins"/>		
Comments	Section		
	<p>Title and Abstract</p> <p>Title to include: A concise indication of the research question/problem.</p> <p>Abstract to include: A concise summary of the empirical study undertaken.</p>		
	<p>Introduction and literature review</p> <p>To include: outline of context (theoretical/conceptual/applied) for the question; analysis of findings of previous related research including gaps in the literature and relevant contributions; logical flow to, and clear presentation of the research problem/ question; an indication of any research expectations, (i.e., hypotheses if applicable).</p>		
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CARDIFF METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

Prifysgol Fetropolitan Caerdydd

CARDIFF SCHOOL OF SPORT

DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF SCIENCE (HONOURS)

SPORTS DEVELOPMENT

**A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A
LOCAL AUTHORITY'S PLAY STRATEGY AND RISK
MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

**(Dissertation submitted under the discipline of
Management & Development)**

IWAN RHYS ROBERTS

ST10001509

IWAN RHYS ROBERTS

ST10001509

CARDIFF SCHOOL OF SPORT

CARDIFF METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

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MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Cardiff Metropolitan University
Prifysgol Fetropolitan Caerdydd

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Abstract

Background: Play is essential for children's well-being, happiness and development. However, the freedom for outdoor play is declining, there are many factors that have contributed to this, but a major barrier is the current risk-averse, compensation culture in society today. It is essential for play providers to address the barriers to play, and allow children to take risks, while adhering to health and safety legislations with the use of risk management systems.

Purpose: This two-scope study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of Conwy County Borough Council's play strategy and risk management system, and attempts to identify parents' perception of risk.

Research design: A mixed methods approach was used in the collection of data. A qualitative approach was used with the use of interviews, and a mixed methods approach with the use of closed and open questions in a questionnaire.

Method: Two semi-structured interviews were conducted; one with the individual that developed Conwy's play strategy and risk management system, and another with a play worker that had worked for Conwy for a period of 6 weeks. Questionnaires were also completed ($n=21$) by parents from a range of towns and villages in Conwy.

Results: The findings of the questionnaire show that parents are more risk-averse than ever, and emphasise 'stranger danger'. The play strategy and risk management system are being implemented effectively; with training being given to staff on how to provide effective play provision. A shortfall to holiday provision of play was highlighted, with a high staff turnover resulting in the risk management system losing the essential feedback cycle.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.0. Introduction

1.1. Background to the Problem

'Play is the most important activity that children will take part in outside as it is a means through which they find stimulation, well-being and happiness in order to grow physically, emotionally and intellectually.'

(Filer, 2008. p.7).

There is extensive research on the benefits of play, and outdoor play in particular, for children (Tovey, 2007., Play England, 2008., Casey, 2007). However, the freedom for outdoor play is declining and one of the major barriers seems to be the rise in anxiety for children's safety (Bilton, 2010). This 'cotton wool' culture has been identified by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), who are working on changing the perception that health and safety denies children opportunity to play (HSE, 2012). They encourage play providers to use 'risk-benefit assessments' in order to weigh up risks against the benefits of the activity, because the benefits accumulate from its characteristics of spontaneity and personal control (PlayEngland, 2008). As safety is of primary concern for parents, it is important for play providers put their policies into practice; allowing children to take risks and therefore reaping the benefits of play, while taking appropriate measures to ensure their safety and well-being under the health and safety at work act 1974.

1.2. Introducing the Aims and Objectives

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of Conwy County Borough Council's play strategy and risk management system. This will identify if the use of risk-benefit assessments are effective in allowing children to take risks, and therefore benefit from the experience, whilst keeping them from being exposed to serious harm. This was carried out by using a qualitative approach with the use of two semi-structured interviews. One interview was conducted with the individual that developed Conwy's play strategy and risk management system, and the other with a play worker that had worked for Conwy for a period of 6 weeks. The data gathered was analysed and compared with the use of tables, before conclusions were drawn. In addition to this, parents' perception of risk was identified, with the use of a mixed methods approach using

questionnaires. This involved parents from several areas around Conwy answering open (qualitative approach) and closed (quantitative approach) questions and the data gathered was analysed and used to support previous research as well as the findings from the interviews conducted.

Limitations to the study include the size of the samples used; only one play worker was interviewed and therefore the data collected does not represent the thoughts and feelings of the whole organisation. Also, the amount of data collected with the use of the questionnaire was less than anticipated and therefore is a limitation to the study.

CHAPTER 2
Literature Review

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Children's Play

The freedom to play outdoors is declining rapidly in both rural and urban areas and has been for the past 40 years or so (Tovey, 2007). Reasons for this include increase in traffic, technology; computer games etc and spaces to play. However the major barrier to play seems to be the unprecedented rise in anxiety for children's safety (Tovey, 2007., PlayEngland, 2008., Furedi, 2002). This 'culture of fear' or 'cotton wool culture' is also highlighted by Gill (2007) who suggested that there is much emphasis on 'stranger danger' by parents on their children today. In addition to this, Cunningham (2006) stated that childhood is being undermined by risk aversion and that adults are interfering too much.

Playday is an organisation which is coordinated by Play England, and work in partnership with Play Wales, Play Scotland and Play Board Northern Ireland. Their Playday Opinion Poll (2010) research showed that 90% of adults played out regularly in their street as children; with 29% of children aged 7-14 saying that they don't play or 'hang out' in their street at all and nearly three quarters of children (73%) say they would like to spend more time playing or hanging out outside where they live (Play England, 2010). Previous research also suggests that a half of children aged 7-12 are not allowed to climb a tree without an adult present and that one in five children aged 7-12 have been stopped from playing conkers because it's 'too dangerous.' (Play England, 2008).

The decline in children's access to space and time to play has raised serious concerns regarding their development and their immediate and long-term health and well-being (Casey, 2007). One important issue is the lack of physical activity and its link with obesity; and childhood obesity is increasing, with NHS statistics revealing that almost a quarter of children are overweight or obese by the time they start primary school, and more than a third are unhealthily heavy by the time they leave (NHS, 2010). Overweight and obesity are linked with chronic health problems, such as cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes; in addition to psychological problems such as poor self-esteem and lack of confidence (Tovey, 2007). When reviewing the 'obesity epidemic', Burdette and Whitaker (2005) emphasised that children do not play in the same ways as they used to.

Furthermore, play offers opportunities for children to develop friendships, negotiate relationships (Casey, 2007), improves community development (Tovey, 2007), and establishes a healthy attitude towards an active lifestyle (Filer, 2008). Research was carried out by the National Children's Bureau (2008) in order to "broaden the evidence base relating to physically active play" in childhood. The research was commissioned by Play England and sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The DCMS consider that embedding an awareness of, and enthusiasm for, physical activity and play in early years is important in itself and to longer-term outcomes. The findings showed that outdoor settings provided far more opportunities for physically active play, especially large movements and vigorous activities. In addition to this, an important factor that affected the quality and quantity of physically active play was the opportunity for self-directed play. Therefore, the research suggests that play – especially self-directed, freely-chosen play – provides good opportunity for physical activity and develops a positive attitude towards a physically active lifestyle. However, the coalition government have recently changed the emphasis of the sport policy to competitive team sports, as part of the Olympic Legacy Policy. This change is in the hope that the London Olympics have "inspired a generation" to be active, however research by Coalter (2007) and Murphy & Bauman (2007) suggests that previous Olympics did not have a positive effect on the host-country's physical activity levels. Furthermore, the transition between children engaging in freely-chosen physically active play, to a competitive team sport setting in schools, may have a negative impact on physical activity levels. This could be a focus of research to be carried out in the future.

2.2 Policy Documents

There has been growing public policy interest in play over recent years (Filer, 2008., Bilton, 2010) with policies such as 'Learning outside the Classroom Manifesto' (DfES, 2006), Play Wales's Play policy (2002) and Play England's Play policy (2008). These policies highlighted the importance of play for children's development, however, Bilton (2010) criticises the level of understanding of play within these policies and how to provide it effectively. "Play is about creating a world in which, for that moment, children are in control and can seek out uncertainty in order to triumph over it – or, if not, no matter, it is only a game."

(Lester and Russell, 2010, p.'X'). From this perspective, it is difficult for children to reap all the benefits of play if there is an adult present; especially an over-protective parent. In addition to this, PlayEngland (2008) suggest there is a need to move away from an instrumental view of play that 'Play for a Change' found in much policy and practice, and instead recognise that the benefits of play accumulate from its characteristics of 'unpredictability, spontaneity, goallessness and personal control' (PlayEngland, 2008, p.3).

Conwy County Borough Council's Children and Young People's Partnership (CYPP) have a 'Play Strategy' that has 3 key aims, which are linked with the slogan that is; 'Working in partnership for all children's right to play'. This fundamental right to play is stated under Article 31 of the rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; "Children have the right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities." (UNICEF, 1992). Conwy's first aim is to support organisations and partners leading them to a better understanding of children's play behaviour and how to best support it. The second is to address the barriers that affect children's time and space to play; and the third is to provide inclusive play provision to those who's time and space to play is compromised. In addition to this, the Welsh Assembly Government released the 'Play Sufficiency Assessment Regulations' in 2012. These Regulations were made under section 11 (1) of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010, which is the local authority duties in regard to play opportunities for children). The regulations require local authorities to carry out an assessment of the sufficiency of play opportunities in its area, in addition to consultation with individuals and groups, and an appropriate action plan. This will provide guidance to Conwy in achieving the third aim in the play strategy. Local authorities must complete the first assessment within 4 months of the Regulations coming into force (Nov 2nd, 2012). Also, following a first assessment a local authority must complete an assessment every 3 years (National Assembly for Wales, 2012).

2.3 Health and Safety

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) released a statement in September, 2012 expressing their full support of play and that children should have the opportunity to take risks. Furthermore, Judith Hackitt, Chair of the HSE, stated that 'Health

and safety laws are often wrongly cited as a reason to deny children opportunities, contributing to a cotton wool culture.’ (PlayEngland, 2008). In addition to this, it was expressed that whilst HSE’s foremost priority is on health and safety in the workplace, they also agree that attitudes to risk are formed long before young people enter the world of work and recognises the benefits of allowing children and young people of all ages and abilities to have challenging play opportunities. The HSE’s attitude towards play is summarised in a key message in their statement;

“Play is great for children’s well-being and development. When planning and providing play opportunities, the goal is not to eliminate risk, but to weigh up the risks and benefits. No child will learn about risk if they are wrapped in cotton wool”

(HSE, 2012).

The HSE statement has excited those involved in play; with the Chairman of the Play Safety Forum, Robin Sutcliffe, stating that it will be a landmark statement and thanking HSE for recognising and “embracing the concept of play, and for working with PSF so positively.” (PlayEngland, 2012).

The term “safe” means something different to everybody, because of their own experiences (Tovey, 2007). It can be argued that ‘cotton wool’ culture is unsafe because it does not provide challenge and therefore denies children opportunities to develop skills to be safe. Stephenson (2003) found that children aged from infant to five years old, preferred and sought experiences for physical risk-taking. In addition to this, the findings suggested that an experience was deemed ‘scary’ or risky for the children if they were attempting something never done before, overcoming fear or if they were on the borderline of control; being ‘in control of being out of control.’ (Lester and Russell, 2008). Furthermore, Ball (2002) contributes to this finding through his report: “Playgrounds – risks, benefits and choices”. By examining the research carried out in the UK on safety, accidents and children’s developmental benefits of playing (in playgrounds), his conclusion was that children learn risk assessment and how to overcome risk situations by risk taking in play. Judith Hackitt stated that if children are not allowed the

experience of managed risk, the next generation entering the workplace will not be so much risk averse as completely risk naïve (Play England, 2008).

Furthermore, there is a key message in HSE's statement; 'Accidents and mistakes happen during play – but fear of litigation and prosecution has been blown out of proportion.' (HSE, 2012). The government has recognised this growing problem of a 'fear of litigation' culture that is present in the world of work in the UK. In the 'Common Sense – Common Safety' report, Lord Young published his review of health and safety legislation. It is expressed in the report that although good health and safety is vitally important, 'legislation that is designed to protect people from major hazards has been extended inappropriately to cover every walk of life, no matter how low risk.' (HSE, 2010). In addition to this, there is a 'compensation culture' in this country, which is driven by litigation; and it is this that Lord Young believes to be the primary problem that has beset health and safety. He goes on to explain that this climate of fear is a result of some health and safety consultants with a 'perverse incentive' to take an extreme approach to applying health and safety regulations. Consequently, this introduces a goal of eliminating all risk from the workplace, and therefore not following the rational, proportionate approach that the Health and Safety at Work Act demands (HSE, 2010., Health and Safety at Work Act, 1974., HSE, 2006). This, along with an over cautious approach by insurance companies is the source of the problem. On the other hand, this cautious approach and emphasis by insurance companies may benefit organisations in the sense that they are more aware of their duty of care to all employees.

Play work is fully supported by HSE, stating that they want to "encourage a focus on the sensible and proportionate control of real risks and not on unnecessary paperwork" (HSE, 2012., p.1) and going on to explain that their primary interest is in real risks that may arise from breaches of the law (HSE, 2012). That is to say, although play providers have the backing from HSE, this does not mean that they do not need to follow regulations; by law (Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 section 2(3)) if you employ five or more people organisations must have a written health and safety policy (HSE, 2012). The health and safety at work act (1974) requires employers to ensure 'so far as is reasonably practicable', the health,

safety and welfare of their employees and anybody else who may be affected by their work. The term 'reasonably practicable' has been interpreted in law to mean that an employer is entitled to take into account the cost of any measure he may be considering, against the consequences of the risk involved.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (the Management Regulations) make more precise and clear what employers are required to do to manage health and safety under the Health and Safety at Work Act, and aids organisations in designing and implementing a risk management system. These regulations, like the Act, apply to every activity in the organisation. For example; as stated above, employers must ensure the health and well-being of anybody that may be affected by their work. This is covered in the Management Regulations in Section 3 ((1)(b)); "the risks to the health and safety of persons not in his employment arising out of or in connection with the conduct by him of his undertaking". The primary requirement of the employer is to carry out risk assessments and any employer with five or more employees must record significant findings of the risk assessment. Furthermore, questions have been raised to whether risk assessments are actually carried out properly and that some have the attitude that it is merely a 'tick-box exercise' in order to comply with the law (HSW, 2009., Barton, 2007). It is moral requirement for employers to ensure the well-being of their employees and customers/clients, but the question is to what extent. An activity provider's attitude towards risk management standards should consistently be viewed as the minimum acceptable; writing in their supporting documents what they actually do; not what they think they do or aim for or aspire to do, nor what they would like others to believe they do (Barton, 2007).

Barton (2007) categorises risk assessments into four types; 'generic risk assessment', 'site specific risk assessment', 'daily risk assessment' and 'dynamic risk assessment'. In his book; 'Safety, risk and adventure in outdoor activities' he conveys his strong opinion that society is becoming more and more risk averse. Furthermore, he suggests that although it is vital for teachers, instructors and providers of outdoor activities to continually aspire to the highest standards of risk management, there is a "public obsession with safety and blame and an even

greater aversion to any kind of risk threatens the availability of adventure in any meaningful form.” (Barton, 2007, p.3).

As children’s safety is the primary concern, it is important for play providers to have a high quality risk management system in place. Conwy County Borough Council (CCBC, 2012) has a risk management policy which explains their approach to the management of risk in services and facilities for children and young people across the county. It is made clear from the beginning that the aim of this policy is to challenge the current risk-averse nature of society, before going on to state that they believe that ‘all elements involved in the management of risk can, and should, incorporate much more than paper risk assessments alone.’ (CCBC, 2012). The risk management system (Appendix A) shows that risk management is an on-going process and the term ‘risk-benefit assessments’ is prevalent throughout. A risk-benefit approach is about assessing what is a ‘reasonable’ risk, and considering the potential benefits of an opportunity against any potential negative outcomes before making a judgement to whether the potential for injury is proportionate to the benefits (Play England, 2008., CCBC). CCBC state that benefits can be physical, emotional, social or a mixture of all three; and the risk of injury is identified by considering the likelihood of the potential injury with the severity of that injury. Furthermore, the ‘primary’ risk assessment in the risk management system is ‘dynamic risk-benefit assessments’. This is the labelled as ‘primary’ because play is characterised by spontaneity, unpredictability and children seeking uncertainty (Play England, 2008., HSE, 2012); and therefore risks and hazards will appear while the children play and staff have a requirement to carry out constant dynamic risk assessment. As identified, perceptions of risk are subjective due to people’s own experiences. Therefore, CCBC state that access to training will be available for staff in order to have consistency in practice. In addition to this, the ‘secondary’ assessment is ‘paper-based risk-benefit assessments’. In the risk management policy, it is stated that individual play provision sites are risk-managed through a range of methods, including dynamic risk-benefit assessments, regular site checks and specific operational procedures.

It is apparent that CCBC have benchmarked the national standards of risk management of play; Managing Risk in Play Provision: An implementation Guide

(Play England, 2008). Benchmarking is a measurement tool used to gauge or analyse a company's operating performance against that of competitors to identify best practices and make constant improvements (Mertins et al., 1999., Codling, 1992). According to the HSE benchmarking is not just about comparing data or copying your competitors; benchmarking is more about continuously learning from others, learning more about your organisation's strengths and weaknesses in the process, and then acting on the lessons learned. The implementation guide was endorsed by HSE and is mentioned in the 2012 HSE statement (point 13); "HSE supports this guidance, as a sensible approach to risk management." (HSE, 2012, p.3). In addition to this, HSE state in point 7 in the statement that there are industry standards that offer bench marks that can help make the risk-benefit judgement; however, the industry standard mentioned (EN 1176) only concerns playground safety equipment and surface safety, while play sessions are carried out in all spaces, and is not confined to playgrounds.

Risk Management Systems

Risk management systems need to be implemented effectively for the objectives to be achieved (Torkildsen, 2010). Implementation follows the design of the management system and it is the members of staff of an organisation that delivers strategies and implements risk management systems. Therefore, play workers must have a clear understanding of the 'business objectives' or how to provide effective play opportunities as well as follow the operational procedures of the risk management system.

An extreme case of an organisation failing to provide reasonable health and safety is that of the Eton Manor Day Nursery in Essex, where a two year old girl, Rhiya Malin, died after being trapped by her neck, after being left alone for "many minutes". (Daily Telegraph, 2013). The staff would talk on their mobile phones when their manager was not present, even though they knew it was not acceptable. The two members of staff denied failing to take reasonable care of people who might be affected by their actions at work (Section 3 of H&S at Work Act, 1974). They also denied failure to carry out risk assessments and safety checklists, as required by the organisation's normal operating procedures. The

delivery of any service should be safe, professional and customer focused (McMahon-Beattie and Yeoman, 2004).

“Organisational encounters with risk and error are not restricted to the sensational cases that draw media coverage when mistakes, near misses and accidents become public. They are, instead, a routine and systematic part of daily organisational life that only occasionally become visible to outsiders.” (Vaughan, 2005, p.33).

The statement above suggests that risk is prevalent at all times, in any organisation. This is reinforced by Kenett and Raanan (2010) who suggest that operational risks affect large organisations in addition to small and medium-sized enterprises (SME's) in any industry. Due to risk being prevalent at all times, and is a “routine and systematic part of daily organisational life” (Vaughan, 2005) it is imperative to record any significant findings from risk assessments which then informs future risk assessments. Abkowitz (2008) suggested that inadequate training is one reason why disasters occur in the workplace. He went on to state that problems with inadequate training include placing an individual in a position of responsibility and the lack of training may cause them to make mistakes that either initiates an accident or allows a crisis situation to intensify. Abkowitz's (2008) research was generic and covered all industries, including public services, and is therefore relevant to play work.

As play work involves allowing children to take risks it is therefore vitally important to have constant feedback in the risk management system, as the dynamic risk-benefit assessment informs the ‘paper-based’ assessments through the feedback cycle.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

3.0 Methodology

3.1 What is Research?

Gratton and Jones (2010, p.4) define research as “a systematic process of discovery and advancement of human knowledge”. It is an investigation to answer a question, and not merely searching for facts. The justification for researching is generated by a specific research question, hypothesis or a problem, and follows a plan or procedure known as the ‘research process.’

3.2 Clarification of the Research Questions

The research questions being asked in this ‘two-scope’ study are, ‘how effectively is the Conwy play strategy and risk management system being implemented?’ and ‘what are parents’ perceptions of risk in play?’ Smith (2010) stated that selecting the right strategy will help find the right answers and that the research approach is dictated by the nature of the questions asked. Due to the nature of this study’s questions, the research type is ‘exploratory’ and ‘descriptive.’ This is because preliminary data was gathered - rather than testing a theory – in order to attempt to establish patterns and the phenomena was described as it exists.

3.3 Options available

There are two broad types of methodological approaches to research; qualitative and quantitative. Smith (2010) suggests that there are strengths and weaknesses to both types, but one of the main differences are; a quantitative approach typically involves the collection of numerical data where as qualitative data is non-numerical, relating to characteristics or people’s opinions (Lashley & Best, 2001). Furthermore, both approaches can be combined and used as a mixed method of research. Creswell (2006) gave a definition of a mixed methods research as “a research design with philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry” (p.5). As a methodology, it involves these “philosophical assumptions” which guide the collection and analysis of data, as well as the mixture of quantitative and qualitative approaches in the different stages of the research process. In addition to this, Creswell (2006) also stated that the use of quantitative and qualitative in combination results in a better understanding of research problems than either

approach alone. This was taken into consideration when designing the approach for data collection.

3.4 Selected Method

Due to the nature of this study, a mixture of approaches was used to gather the primary data. A qualitative approach was used with the use of interviews to gather raw data from those delivering the play strategy and risk management system. This is because the thoughts and feelings of people are difficult to quantify and the phenomenon cannot be measured numerically (Creswell, 2003). Furthermore, a mixed methods research approach was used in the questionnaire; with the use of both closed and open questions. This was because it was important for the data to be detailed enough to understand parents perception of risk. Young and Atkinson (2012) suggested that early sports psychology research was dominated by positivist, quantitative approaches. However, in recent years, it has been acknowledged that qualitative research needs to be used in order to understand the underlying feeling, emotions and experiences that are related to behaviour; in this case, parents' perceptions of play and risk. Gratton and Jones (2010) state that open questions should be used in questionnaires when the researcher needs to gather qualitative data, or is "unsure of the likely responses, responses are likely to be complex" or "the respondent's own words are important" (p.133). These all apply to this study as everybody's perception of risk and view on the term 'safe' is different (Tovey, 2007).

3.5 Participants

Interviews;

The first participant interviewed (interviewee 1) was the person that developed the play strategy for Conwy County Borough Council. This strategy shapes the direction of play development in Conwy and all departments that are involved in delivering play have to work toward the objectives set out in the Conwy play strategy. This participant fell into the 'elite interview' category as he has significant amount of experience and authority in play work in the local council and has a responsible position as well as a leadership role. Kvale (2007) stated that elite interviews are with persons who are leaders or experts in a community, people

who are usually in powerful positions. This ensured that a sufficient amount of data was collected regarding the participant's knowledge and opinion of children's play and risk management systems. The second participant (interviewee 2) was a play worker who had worked for Conwy Council for a period of six weeks over the summer holiday. This participant was chosen to discover the strategic intent; the strategic purpose at implementation level and practical implications (Fitzroy et al., 2012). In other words, to discover the role of this member of staff and the level of understanding that this person has of play work and the risk management system in order to discover if the play strategy and management system are being implemented effectively.

Questionnaires;

Questionnaires were given to parents to complete during the school half term holidays in February, 2013, when dropping off their children at four different sites across Conwy for the Playing Out scheme. This population was chosen because the researcher had good accessibility to the parents, as he was a member of staff working in the scheme. Clark-Carter (2004) stated that in most cases, the population under investigation will be too big to collect data from every member, and therefore a smaller sample would be chosen. However, as the maximum number of children allowed in each play session was 20, the approach was to hand out questionnaires to every parent. Therefore, the maximum possible number of questionnaires from this population would have been 100. However, not many children attended the scheme therefore a second population was used in addition to the first. The second population included parents attending a 'Rural Families First Project' in Llanrwst in Conwy. This group of parents was chosen because they have children the same ages as those attending the Playing Out scheme, and they are from a variety of towns and villages across Conwy therefore a wider range of data was collected.

3.6 Process

Interviews were arranged with the two participants in advance, and the locations selected were in places where the participants felt comfortable; as suggested by King and Horrocks (2010). This is because it generates more data and the interviewees talk for a longer period of time. In addition to this, the relationship

between the interviewer and interviewee is crucial to the method (Seidman, 2013) and a good interview tends to focus on people's actual experiences with the use of flexible, open-ended questions (King and Horrocks, 2010). This was taken into account when designing the interview questions in order to gather reliable data; a list of the general questions that were going to be asked were given to the interviewee before carrying out the interview, which enabled them to prepare somewhat. Furthermore, introductory questions were used before asking primarily open-ended questions for the remainder of the interviews. The questions were carefully selected and presented in a logical order to create and maintain a positive flow for the duration of the interview. Also, attentive listening and eye contact was crucial for as much information as possible to be gathered (Kvale, 2007). A Dictaphone application was used on an iPad in order to record the interviews undertaken. The questionnaires were created using Microsoft Word and included a covering letter. Covering letters are extremely important as a method of maximising the response rate (Gratton and Jones, 2010). It consisted of an introduction to who the researcher is, a statement of why the research is being carried out and a statement reassuring the participants regarding anonymity and confidentiality of the data collected. The researcher stood close by while the participants completed the questionnaires on site after a play session, which can be problematic according to Smith (2010) as the participant may not have the time or inclination to complete it. In addition to this, the data from the second sample was collected using postal questionnaires as the researcher did not have time to gain access to the population for face-to-face collection. Postal questionnaires are considered cost effective and may generate more reliable results as there is an avoidance of interviewer bias. However, postal questionnaires have generally low response rates and there is no opportunity to offer explanations to participants of poor literacy or people with language difficulties (Oppenheim, 2000). These two different methods of data collection may be a limitation to the study as it may have influenced the reliability of the results.

3.7 Data analysis

The interview recordings were transcribed manually using Microsoft Word. This allowed the interviewer to listen to the interview playback which results in a better understanding of the data and creates more reliability in the data analysis and

results (Ashmore and Reed, 2000). Similarities and reoccurring themes in the transcripts were then picked out and tables were created comparing the two interviewees' answers to each theme. Furthermore, the most relevant questions from the questionnaire were analysed and presented in tables and a graph.

3.8 Validity and Reliability

Interviews;

A pilot interview was carried out before the two interviews, with a participant that had a good grasp of the field. Pilot interviews enable researchers to test the questions to see if they generate good responses, and to see if the interview flows (Light et al., 1990). In addition to this, the pilot interview gives the researcher the chance to use the recording equipment; in this study, it was identified in the pilot study the exact position in which the iPad needed to be placed in order to record the interviews effectively. Furthermore, it was important to have a consistency in methods while collecting the data (Gratton and Jones, 2010) therefore the interviews were treated in the same way, with the emphasis being on open questions so that the interviewee gave as much information as possible.

Questionnaires;

The covering letter included with each questionnaire stated that the information obtained would be completely anonymous, which results in the participant being more truthful (Gratton and Jones, 2010). Also, a small amount of questions were included as there were some qualitative questions which take more time to complete.

3.9 Limitations

An opportunity or convenient sampling is the gathering of data on the basis of the availability of individuals. Russell et al., (2004) state that the results obtained using this sampling may not generalise back to the target population. As the target population for the questionnaires was parents whose children attend play sessions – because it is likely that this population have experience of their children playing in different locations and/or any barriers that affect their play – the need for the second, different sample is a limitation to the study. However, due to the nature of

this study, any parent with a child of the age in question (5-14) filling out the questionnaire would generate useful data. This is because every child plays (PlayEngland, 2008) and people's perception of risk are different (Tovey, 2007). Furthermore, only one member of staff was interviewed which may be a limitation to the study as it does not represent the whole organisation; this participant may have more/less experience and knowledge than the other members of staff.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

4.0 Results

4.1 Interview Analysis

Table 1: Interview analysis: Barriers to children Play

Interviewee 1	Interviewee 2
<p><i>“the biggest one for parents was fear, and fear of traffic in particular.”</i></p> <p><i>“For kids, it was the attitude of adults; grumpy grown-ups”</i></p> <p><i>“one or two grumpy people in a community that aren’t in favour of children playing and their voice gets heard above everybody else it seems.”</i></p>	<p><i>“the space they’ve got, some sites were better than others”</i></p>
<p>Interviewee 1 discussed the findings of a consultation into children’s barriers to play; which suggested that fear was a major barrier, in addition to adults having a negative attitude toward children’s play. Interviewee showed less knowledge and experience in the area but suggested that the space was important to the quality of a play experience.</p>	

Table 2: Interview analysis: Culture of fear

Interviewee 1	Interviewee 2
<p><i>“organisational fears about children taking risks...schools and leisure groups; there’s been so much about risk assessments and risk management that people have worries about letting their kids use tools, or climb or those sorts of things.”</i></p> <p>Interviewer: agree that people are more risk averse than ever these days? <i>“Yeah definitely”</i></p>	<p><i>“there was a parent in Abergele that said ‘I wouldn’t let her climb these trees usually’ when she saw her daughter climbing.”</i></p>
<p>Interviewee 1 suggested that it is not just parents’ fear that is a barrier but also organisational fear, because of the emphasis on risk management. Interviewee 2 had an experience of a parent’s fear of her child taking risks.</p>	

Table 3: Interview analysis: Benefits of children's play

Interviewee 1	Interviewee 2
<p><i>“Playing kind of helps them create flexible personality, and learn to deal with disappointment and failure. They learn skills around socialising; they build peer networks within their community through playing.”</i></p> <p><i>“There’s a lot of evidence that says taking risks and falling out with friends and doing all these things at the time when a child’s brain is developing and it’s got “plasticity” they say, they open up neural pathways, that may not get used again until they’re thirty or whatever age.”</i></p> <p><i>“by not letting them (children) have access to risk...they don’t learn to calculate risk; because that’s what it’s about, children, through their play, learn to calculate where their boundaries are, and that’s massively important... They take incremental risk, and that’s what we do as adults”</i></p>	<p><i>“They make friends; they didn’t stick to their group of friends, everyone mixed when they played.”</i></p> <p><i>“I think there’s a lot more sprinting in sports, it’s higher intensity, but play is constant moving around.”</i></p> <p><i>“That’s how you learn” (taking risks)</i></p>
<p>Interviewee 1 showed much more knowledge of the benefits of play than Interviewee 2, which was expected as the former fell under the ‘elite interview’ category. Both interviewees suggested that play has a strong community cohesion aspect, as well as social and physical benefits. There was also a mutual opinion that risk taking is beneficial for children.</p>	

Table 4: Interview analysis: Risk-benefit Assessments

Interviewee 1	Interviewee 2
<p>HSE statement <i>“massively significant”... “highest authority in the country saying ‘yes, we shouldn’t wrap our children in cotton wool’ and ‘risk-benefit assessment is more important when we’re talking about children’s play than risk assessment alone”</i></p> <p><i>“risk-benefit assessment is important to reduce the number of fatalities and serious injuries, not to reduce the number of bumps and scrapes and bruises, because those are part of day</i></p>	<p><i>“I remember getting loads of scratches and bruises when I was younger...Some of the most fun things usually have higher risk”</i></p> <p><i>“letting them (children) take risks, but weighing up that risk to the benefit of what they were doing.”</i></p>

<p><i>to day life.”</i></p> <p><i>“no risk assessment is done without some consideration of the benefit”</i></p>	
<p>Both interviewees had the view that minor injuries are part of children’s play, and that risk-benefit assessments are a good approach to managing risk in play. Interviewee 1 had extensive knowledge on the subject, while interviewee 2 had only the basic understanding from the training received.</p>	

Table 5: Interview analysis: Play strategy Implementation

Interviewee 1	Interviewee 2
<p><i>“I think Play for a Change is fantastic to benchmark from”</i></p> <p><i>“not just play work theorists that have looked at it, and it’s not just sociologists...it’s neuroscience, it’s child development”</i></p> <p><i>“not just about learning through play, it’s about playing within its’ own right”</i></p>	<p><i>“step-back’ from a situation and make a judgement.”</i></p> <p><i>“we were trained to let them choose what they wanted to do, but if they got bored or asked us what they could do, we’d set something up.”</i></p> <p><i>“hard not to get involved, and hard to let them lead and watch them building dens, when I knew it was going to fall over or break.”</i></p>
<p>Interviewee 1 showed extensive knowledge on how play should be provided effectively, and suggested that the ‘Play for a Change’ policy is what organisations should benchmark from, and goes on to explain why. The findings from interviewee 2 shows that training on how to provide effective play provision was received but the lack of experience meant that it did not get implemented to its full extent.</p>	

Table 6: Interview analysis: Risk management Implementation

Interviewee 1	Interviewee 2
<p>In answer to the question to whether the staff implement the risk management system effectively; <i>“Not one hundred percent, no.”</i></p> <p><i>“One of the challenges we have, particularly in seasonal provision...High staff turnover... So that ability to constantly update people’s knowledge is not there so it’s not so much about the play workers, it’s about us being able to provide the support ongoing</i></p>	<p>In answer to whether the interviewee was ready for the 6 weeks after the week of training, regarding dynamic risk-benefit assessments; <i>“Not really, but I got used to it as the weeks went by, got to know the kids abilities and things.”</i></p> <p>Interviewer: Did you get support or feedback sessions about it (dynamic risk-benefit assessments) during the weeks?</p>

<p><i>that's needed to implement those sorts of things; and that sort of feedback cycle gets lost when people move on"</i></p> <p><i>"without doing dynamic risk assessment... you can't write what we call an operational risk assessment"</i></p> <p><i>"it's informed by the primary dynamic risk-benefit assessment and if we realise things are slightly different, then that has to inform the paper based risk assessments."</i></p>	<p><i>"No, but like I said, we just got better at it, and got to know the kids. And there was a feedback session at the end of the summer"</i></p> <p>Paper-based risk assessments; <i>"There were site-specific risk assessments... daily checklists – first thing we would do every day."</i></p>
<p>Interviewee 1 recognises a shortfall of the holiday provision of play sessions, and suggests that the risk management system is not being implemented effectively. Interviewee 2 suggests that he was "not really" ready for the play provision in regards to the use of dynamic risk-benefit assessments, but showed good knowledge of the paper-based risk assessments, which were completed to a good standard.</p>	

4.2 Questionnaire Results

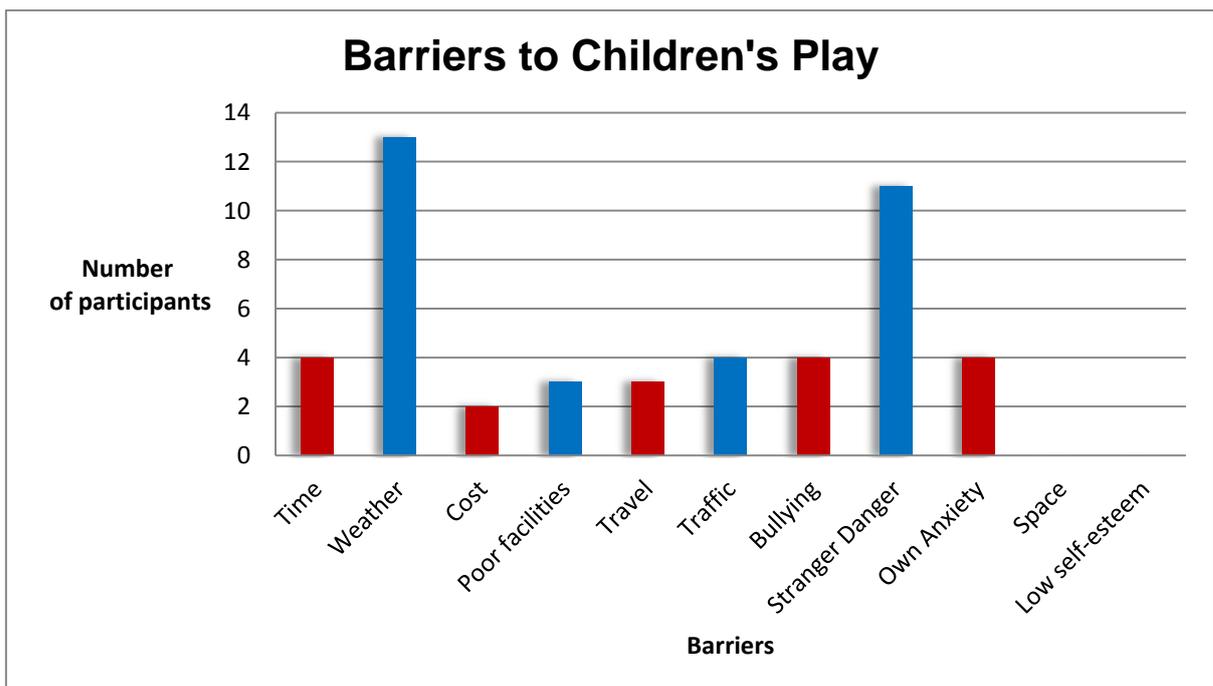
Table 7: Questionnaire question 1 results

Question	YES	NO
<p>Would you let your child(ren) play in the same places/ways that you did?</p>	<p>52%</p>	<p>48%</p>
<p>If NO, why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Area much more built up, families not looking out for each other." • 40% of those that answered "no" mentioned safety. • 30% mentioned traffic. 		

Table 8: Questionnaire question 2 results

<p>Where does your child(ren) most often play?</p>	<p>Most prevalent answers included, “Garden”, “Home” and “Park”</p>
<p>Why There?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 57% mentioned safety. • “Supervised by community that knows them well”. • Only one participant stated that it was “more fun”. 	

Figure 1: Questionnaire question 3; Barriers to children’s play



CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

5.0 Discussion

This section discusses the implications of the results in regard to the research objectives. The section is in two parts; the first discussing the effectiveness of the implementation of the play strategy, along with parents' perception of risk. This includes a discussion of the results in themes 1, 2, 3 and 5 in addition to the questionnaire results. The second part of this section discusses the findings which are shown in theme 4 and 6, which relate to the effectiveness of the implementation of the risk management system.

5.1 Implementation of the Play Strategy

Conwy's play strategy has three key aims; and these aims were used when identifying themes in the two interviews conducted. The second aim in the strategy is to address the barriers that affect children's time and space to play. Some barriers were identified by Interviewee 2, who suggested that the space children have affects the quality of their play experience, while interviewee 1's findings showed that a major barrier is parents' fear and "fear for traffic in particular". Both these barriers support the findings of Tovey (2007). Furthermore, interviewee 1 agreed that a major barrier to play is the fact that people are more risk averse than ever, with the use of a strong response that was, "yes, definitely." This reinforces the findings of Tovey (2007), Play England (2008) and Furedi (2002). The results of the questionnaire were also consistent with this finding; with 48% of parents stating that they would not allow their children to play in same places/ways that they did – which also supports the findings of Burdette and Whitaker (2005), who suggested that children do not play in the same ways as they used to. In addition to this, of those that stated that they would not let their children play in the same places/ways as they did, 40% mentioned their child's safety as the reason, while 30% mentioned traffic.

Furthermore, when asked to identify the barriers they believed affected their child's play, over half of the participants chose "weather" and "stranger danger"; 62% and 52% of the participants respectively. The fact that the majority voted for "stranger danger" reinforces the findings of Gill (2007) in the literature review, however "weather" being the most popular is inconsistent with the research. This finding could suggest that parents do not want their children to play out in bad

weather in fear of their safety, or perhaps the explanation is as simple as the parents wanting to keep their children dry and clean. Furthermore, there was a lack of elaboration from interviewee 2 when asked about the barriers that affect play, which suggests that there is a weakness in the implementation of the play strategy; if those delivering play do not know the barriers that affect children's play, then the second aim of addressing those barriers may not be achieved. However, interviewee 2 experienced an example of risk aversion as a barrier, or a "cotton wool culture" (Filer, 2008., Play England, 2008), whilst running a play session; *"there was a parent in Abergele that said 'I wouldn't let her climb these trees usually' when she saw her daughter climbing"*. Interviewee 2 then went on to state that the child was allowed to climb the tree as a judgement was made on the ability of the child, and that the training received was *"all about letting them (children) take risks, but weighing that risk to the benefit of what they were doing."* This suggests that although interviewee 2 did not have extensive knowledge of the barriers that affect children's play, the training received enabled the child to have that experience and therefore the second aim of the strategy was realised.

Interviewee 1 showed greater knowledge on the benefits of play than interviewee 2, which was expected because interview 1 fell under the 'elite interview' category. Both interviewees suggested that play has a strong social aspect and improves community development; with interviewee 1 stating that children *"learn skills around socialising; they build peer networks within their community through playing"* and interviewee 2 said that the children made friends and *"everyone mixed when they played"*. These findings support research by Casey (2007) and Tovey (2007). Moreover, both interviewees also compared play with sport and supported Filer's (2008) findings that play establishes a healthy attitude towards an active lifestyle. Interviewee 1 had a strong response to the physical benefits of play, stating that it is *"massively important, even if children don't then transfer that into competitive sport, it's just about being physically active human beings really."* Interviewee 2 compared the level of physical activity in play and sport; *"I think there's a lot more sprinting in sports, it's higher intensity, but play is constant moving around."* This finding is similar to that of the research carried out by the National Children's Bureau (2008) and this study adds to that research.

Interviewee 1 elaborated on how to provide effective play opportunities, which concurs with the research, and stated that *“Play for a Change is fantastic to benchmark from”*. It was also evident that interviewee 2 had received training on the basis that the benefits of play accumulate from its characteristics of unpredictability and spontaneity (Play England, 2008) and stated that *“we were trained to let them choose what they wanted to do, but if they got bored or asked us what they could do, we’d set something up”*. Therefore, the theory on how to provide effective play provision had been implemented into the training of staff, however due to interviewee 2’s lack of experience – being a new member of staff in the holiday provision - it was stated that *“it was hard not to get involved”* and therefore, the play strategy and the benefits of play were not implemented to their full extent.

5.2 Implementation of Risk Management System

Interviewee 1 stated; *“children, through their play, learn to calculate where their boundaries are, and that’s massively important... They take incremental risk, and that’s what we do as adults”*. This is significant because it reiterates what was said by Judith Hackitt, chair of the HSE, who stated that if children are not allowed the experience of managed risk, the next generation that enter the workplace will not be so much risk averse as completely risk naïve (Sutcliffe and Gill, 2008). This suggests that the HSE have a good understanding of play, and that it has been recognised that attitudes towards risk are formed long before people enter the world of work. In addition to this, interviewee 1 stated that, *“the job we’ve got to do now and the next couple of years is to really embed that statement within our policies and our risk management policies in particular”*. Moreover, interviewee 1 stated that *“risk-benefit assessment is important to reduce the number of fatalities and serious injuries, not to reduce the number of bumps and scrapes and bruises, because those are part of day to day life”* while interviewee 2 said, *“I remember getting loads of scratches and bruises when I was younger...Some of the most fun things usually have higher risk”*. These statements support the findings of HSE (2012) and of Lord Young’s review on health and safety legislation; that although health and safety is vitally important (HSE, 2010) and is the foremost priority in the workplace, *“fear of litigation and prosecution has been blown out of proportion”* (HSE, 2012) and that legislation has been inappropriately extended to “cover

every walk of life". Hackitt (2008) stated that health and safety laws are too often "wrongly cited as a reason to deny children opportunities, contributing to a cotton wool culture" (PlayEngland, 2008). This argument is strengthened by a statement from interviewee 1; who suggested that HSE have been trying to "*change that perception that health and safety is always the one to blame. Really, I think now the children are being constrained by the people that are supervising them.*" Therefore, health and safety can no longer be viewed as something that is denying children opportunities for play, as HSE fully support play work, and encourage a focus on the sensible and proportionate control of real risks and not on unnecessary paperwork" (HSE, 2012, p.1) and that their primary interest is in real risks that may arise from breaches of the law (HSE, 2012).

It is therefore about play providers implementing the risk management system with the use of risk-benefit assessments, which are recognised by HSE (2012, p.3) as a "sensible approach to risk management." As expected, interviewee 1 had comprehensive knowledge of risk-benefit assessments, and that dynamic risk-benefit assessments are labelled as 'primary' in the risk management system because they come first; "*without doing dynamic risk assessment...you can't write what we call an operational risk assessment*" and that it "*needs to constantly inform what we write down in our risk assessments*". It is these that inform the paper-based risk assessments and that "*process of feedback is part of the loop that we call the risk management cycle within our policy*". This finding is concurrent with the research by Torkildsen (2010) and Vaughan (2005) in that the process of feedback is essential in management systems. Moreover, it was evident that interviewee 2 had received training on how to implement risk-benefit assessments, stating that it involves, "*letting them (children) take risks, but weighing up that risk to the benefit of what they were doing.*" However, it was then stated that interviewee 2 was "*not really*" ready for the 6 weeks play provision, regarding dynamic risk-benefit assessments, but "*got better at it*" during the weeks. The response "not really" could suggest that not enough training was given – which would be detrimental to the organisations operating performance (Vaughan, 2005., Abkowitz, 2008) - or perhaps it was due to the individual's own inexperience of play work, as it was the individual's first experience of providing play opportunities for children.

Furthermore, interviewee 2 showed good knowledge of the paper-based risk assessments; “*There were site-specific risk assessments... daily checklists – first thing we would do every day*”. The daily checklists are used as ‘control measures’ and the examples of the risk assessments included were consistent with Barton’s (2007) generic risk-assessments which showed good practice. Therefore, the paper-based risk assessments were being completed effectively and therefore adhering to the law and to the Management Regulations -Section 3 ((1)(b)) (1999). However, interviewee 1 identified a shortfall in the holiday provision of play; stating, in answer to whether or not the staff implement the risk management system, “Not one hundred percent, no.” This is due to a high staff turnover where people, like interviewee 2, only work a season or two. A significant statement by interviewee 1 is below;

“that ability to constantly update people’s knowledge is not there so it’s not so much about the play workers, it’s about us being able to provide the support ongoing that’s needed to implement those sorts of things; and that sort of feedback cycle gets lost when people move on”

This suggests that the risk management system is not being implemented effectively in the holiday provisions of play and interviewee 1 has realised this. The on-going process of the risk management system lacks the essential feedback cycle. Interviewee 1 stated that “*seasonal workforce is useful, because we do need to provide during the holidays*” and went on to say that, through the development of the play strategy and play sufficiency assessment, “one of the things I want to be making a case for, is that we have more full time play workers.” The play sufficiency assessment was being prepared by the local authority at the time of this study being carried out.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

This study investigated the effectiveness of the Conwy play strategy and risk management system and also identified parents' perceptions of risk in play. The findings show that parents are more risk averse than ever which is a major barrier to children's play, which supports the findings of Tovey (2007) and Play England (2008). This "public obsession with safety and blame" (Barton, 2007, p3) and the current compensation culture in this country (HSE, 2010) has beset health and safety, which is therefore wrongly accused of denying children play opportunities (HSE, 2012). HSE have shown that they fully understand and support play work, providing risk-benefit assessments are completed, which are seen as a sensible and proportionate approach of controlling real risks.

The findings from the interviews suggest that the key aims of the play strategy are being addressed, with training being given to staff regarding how to provide effective play opportunities. It was discovered that play has physical and social benefits, and also improves community development. These findings reinforce research by Casey (2007), Tovey (2007) and Filer (2008). It was also identified that there is a shortfall to the holiday provisions of play, with a high staff turnover resulting in a weakness in the risk management system. As the risk assessments carried out by staff inform the risk management system, the constant change in personnel results in the essential feedback cycle being lost. The risk management system is therefore not being implemented as effective as it would be with full time play workers. Play work now has the support of HSE, and there is government emphasis on play provision in Wales, with the Welsh Assembly's play sufficiency assessment regulations (2012). If this emphasis turns into allocated budgets for full time staff, this would result in improvements in the service with effective implementation of the risk management system. Moreover, this may identify the best way to provide play opportunities with the correct balance of risk and benefits. This would therefore avoid serious injuries or fatalities while allowing children to reap all the benefits involved in play, which includes learning to manage risk (HSE, 2012), which may in turn, tackle the risk-averse nature of society.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

A-1: Conwy Risk Management System

