How have adventure playgrounds in the United Kingdom adapted post-March Lockdown in 2020?

Pete King
Swansea University, p.f.king@swansea.ac.uk

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Abstract

Adventure playgrounds have been a feature in the United Kingdom since the 1950s. Their growth and development was underpinned by 'thinking together', a concept in the Communities of Practice (CoP) approach. In March 2020, the United Kingdom (UK) went into lockdown. This study aimed to find out how adventure playgrounds responded to the Covid-19 situation when they reopened in July 2020. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 18 adventure playground staff from 14 adventure playgrounds. Thematic analysis of the data constructed themes and sub-themes within four main headings: preparation for opening; reduction; targeted service and play behaviour. The results showed how the adventure playgrounds had to re-organise the provision with a reduction in the number of children and young people attending, moving to a more closed-access bookable provision and implementing new policies and procedures to meet the demands of social distancing. This paper reports on the findings of this study and reflects on how the CoP approach has been a feature of the post covid response of these adventure playgrounds.

Key Words: Adventure Playground; Play; Playwork; Lockdown; Covid-19; Community of Practice (CoP)

Introduction

Adventure playgrounds have been a feature in many urban communities since the Second World War when Lady Allen of Hurtwood brought back the idea from Denmark (Allen, 1968). A 'typical' adventure playground will have a large open space for children to make dens using wood and access to tools, such as saws, hammers, and nails. There are also large fixed structures that enable children to climb, swing and jump from. Another common feature is the fire pit to make a fire and cook which enables children to engage in a range of play to meet their developmental needs (Chilton, 2003). Some adventure playgrounds also offer indoor space where more arts and craft activities can occur, although these can still occur outside. Adventure playgrounds meet the play needs of children and also have an important role in the community, offering a "long-term commitment to the children, and a focus on community development" (Chilton, 2003, p. 124).

Play England (2009) consulted with the playwork field to consider what key elements make up the modern-day adventure playground in order to reflect changes in legislation and the workforce. 12 key elements that make up modern-day adventure playgrounds were identified, and an adventure playground was defined as follows:

"An adventure playground can be described as a space dedicated solely to children's play, where skilled playworkers enable and facilitate the ownership, development, and design — physically, socially, and culturally — by the children playing there." (PE, 2009, p. 1)

The 12 key elements were updated in 2017 (PlayEngland, 2017) and focus five areas: a skilled and qualified workforce adhering to the 8 Playwork Principles (Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group (PPSG), 2005) (Key Element 1); children control the choice and content of

their chosen type of play (Hughes, 2002) (Key Elements 2, 3 & 5); inclusive free access to the play space which children and young people can manipulate (key elements 3, 6, 7 & 8) and risk management based on the concept of risk-benefit (PlayEngland, 2013) (Key Element 12). Although there have been changes in how adventure playgrounds run concerning staffing and legislation, one aspect which remained is a Key Element 9, the importance of being part of the community.

It has been argued that the development of playwork as a profession is still evolving from being a Community of Practice (CoP) (King & Newstead, 2020), and adventure playgrounds can be regarded being a prime example of a CoP, defined as:

> [A] group of people who share a passion, a concern, or a set of problems regarding a particular topic, and who interact regularly in order to deepen their knowledge and expertise, and to learn how to do things better. A CoP is characterized by mutual learning, shared practice, inseparable membership, and joint exploration of ideas (Mohajan, 2017, p. 1)

The CoP is formed by a collective of like-minded people working for shared goals (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015), an approach reflected in the emergence of the adventure playground movement in the United Kingdom. Within the area of adventure playgrounds, evidence of working to shared goals can be found in the reflective accounts of Benjamin (1961) and Lambert (1974) and Pearson (1974), where like-minded people shared experiences and knowledge through the formation of the London Adventure Playground Association facilitated by the National Playing Fields Association (LAPA) (Benjamin, 1961).

CoP have a "passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger, 2011, p. 1). Current shared goals and thinking can still be found in the 12 Key Elements for adventure playgrounds (PlayEngland , 2017). These 12 Key Elements were developed by those involved specifically in communities where there is an adventure playground. The 12 Key Elements are an example of "thinking together" (Pyrko et. al., 2017, p. 391), where learning and knowledge are shared within and between groups (Johnson, 2001) to provide practice with a "'a set frameworks, ideas, tools, information, styles, language, stories, and documents" (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 29). Another aspect of CoP is the need to "care about the same real-life problems or hot topics" (Pyrko et al., 2017). In March 2020, the adventure playground experienced a 'real-life problem' affecting everybody when the UK, as with the rest of the world, responded to a new global pandemic.

In March 2020, the United Kingdom (UK) went into lockdown resulting in adventure playgrounds closing for three months, until July 2020. Although all the adventure playgrounds were closed, many of them still ran some sort of alternative service, such as food banks, or providing play resources and delivering them to the children's family home (King, 2020).

When adventure playgrounds opened their gates to children and families again in July, summer playwork provision could be offered. Specific guidance for adventure playgrounds was not provided by the UK Government, although aspects of safe and clean equipment, social distancing and numbers allowed permitted at any one time were included in various published guidelines (GOV.UK, 2020a; GOV.UK, 2020, b). It is important to note that variations existed between England, Scotland, and Wales. For example, in Scotland and Wales children using outdoor space under the age of 11 did not need to adhere to social

distancing (Play Scotland, 2020; GOV.Wales, 2020a). In Wales, up to 30 children could attend their adventure playground under Section 8 of the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (Wales) Regulations 2020 (GOV.Wales, 2020b). In England, social distancing applied to all children where published guidelines required small 'bubbles' of children of no more than 15 who had to be booked in beforehand (GOV.UK, 2020a; GOV.UK, 2020a). This had implications on who would be able to use adventure playgrounds, as the age range is commonly between 5 and 15 years of age.

This study was a follow-up on how adventure playgrounds adapted to deliver playwork post-March 2020 lockdown (King, 2020). The study set out to investigate how adventure playgrounds were still able to provide a service to children despite the challenges of Covid-19 restrictions, and how adventure playgrounds managed to cope as a profession supporting children's play in such challenging circumstances..

Method

The research design used semi-structured interviews. This was undertaken as it enabled the use of an interview guide (Bernard, 2013) where a "written list of questions and topics are covered in a particular order" (Bernard, 2013, p.182) as in structured interviews, but also allows "the freewheeling quality of unstructured interviews (Bernard, 2013, p.182). The interview questions were:

- Describe your role on the adventure playground?

- How did the adventure playground run before the March (2020) lockdown?

- How has the adventure playground run post-March (2020) lockdown?

- What new policies and procedures have had to be put in place?

- How have the children played since coming back to the adventure playground?

- How has your playwork practice been since you returned to work?

- How has social distancing been implemented on the adventure playground?

The use of semi-structured interviews allowed the flexibility of follow-up questions from the structured guide. All interviews were undertaken remotely using the Zoom® platform. This enabled a face-to-face interviews to be undertaken and recorded for transcription and analysis. At the start of the interview, participants were reminded of the purpose of the study, confirmed that the informed consent was granted and that were aware of their right to withdraw from the interview at any time. This study was granted ethical approval from the College of Human and Health Sciences Ethics Committee, Swansea University.

Participants

Participants were invited to take part in the study through online social media using Twitter® and playwork-specific Facebook® pages. Interested participants were sent the Participation Information Sheet (PIS) and consent form which they signed and returned. Participants had worked in the playwork sector between less than 1 year to over 30 years. The number of participants who took part in the study was 18, representing different roles within the adventure playground. The breakdown of the different roles was: Trustee 2; Director 4; Manager 8; Senior Playworker 2 and Playworker 2. However, from the interviews it was clear that those in a more managerial roles were involved in all aspects of the adventure playground, including face-to-face delivery(which was unpaid in the case of the Trustee).

Data Analysis

Transcription accuracy was undertaken by comparing the audio recording with the written transcript produced by Zoom®. All transcribed interviews were uploaded into the NVivo 12® software for analysis. Data analysis was undertaken using the thematic analysis framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is a six-step process that involves the reading and re-reading of each transcribed interview to further immerse the researcher into the data (Green et. al., 2007).

This approach to analysis identifies initial codes which are then grouped into themes, a process in qualitative research called collapsing the data (Elliot, 2018). The thematic analysis was started after interview 10, and by the final interview (18) no new initial codes or themes emerged. This suggested that the data had reached saturation point (Saunders et. al., 2017). The results from the thematic analysis were sent to each of the interviewees for feedback concerning the trustworthiness of the data analysis (Shenton, 2004). Feedback provided by the four interviewees indicated that the themes and sub-themes were an accurate reflection.

Results

The results section is divided up into pre-lockdown, lockdown, and post-lockdown. This was undertaken to show how adventure playgrounds operated in three stages: before the March 2020 lockdown, during the March to July 2020 lockdown, and re-opening post-lockdown in July 2020.

Pre-Lockdown

When asked how the adventure playground ran before the March 2020 lockdown, Table 1 shows similarities between the provision being open access and variations with the age range and numbers for the users and the times of opening. The table compares and contrasts how the participating adventure playgrounds met the needs of the communities.

Open access is where children and young people can arrive and leave when they want to and do not have to be supervised by an adult. For most adventure playgrounds the age range is 5-15 years, although for some children under 8 years have to be accompanied by an adult. The total numbers for each adventure playground relate to children not all being there at the same time, as the amount of time they stay on the adventure playground is determined by the children themselves. Some may stay for the whole session; others use it as a meeting place and may stay only for a short time. Most adventure playgrounds open term-time and during the holiday provision, offering play provision during the week and on Saturdays. Most adventure playgrounds provided food for the children, whether it is every day or part of a cooking activity, as reflected in the following comment:

> "We make sure there are snacks and food in there for the kids who are cooking. If there is anything hot to cook like vegetables, we prep all the vegetables and then they will take it out to the rest of the kids, on big trays or on tables" (Interview 16, Senior Playworker, South East England).

An adventure playground may be a standalone provision or be part of other types of children's services. For example, in Wales an adventure playground may be linked to the pre-school Flying Start initiative, which offers free childcare. For others, the adventure

playground provides more specific services, for example providing some form of youth service or running sessions for specific groups, such as disabled children, single-gender, or part of the alternative curriculum for schools.

The responses provided by all the participants reflect the 12 Key Elements that make up an adventure playground with respect to children controlling the play and space with the playworkers supporting them. The following comment is representative of the close community connection developed by the playgrounds:

> "People knock on the door for a chat or some support and so we keep connected with the community when we are not delivering" (Interview 11, Senior Playworker, South England)

Community connection is important as it reflects the Key Element of 'At the heart of the community' which is key to long term sustainability (PlayEngland, 2017).

An examination of the children's attendance indicates that for afterschool, weekends and school holidays, the adventure playgrounds are used by children and young people, both within and further afield of the local community:

> "Normally in the summer playscheme we map the postcode who we register and have this wonderful map showing they are coming from all over the county and beyond" (Interview 18, Trustee, South England)

Thus, during the pre-lockdown period, the adventure playgrounds provided a space to play for a lot of children, both locally and from afar.

During Lockdown

The responses from the 18 playworkers within this study also reflected the three themes identified by King (2021) of reduced or no playwork provision, the need to develop new methods to deliver playwork, and anticipation of a more therapeutic role. This is represented by the following comments from participants in this study:

"This one closed during the full lockdown like all the others and re-opened 2-3 weeks into the summer holidays" (Interview 4, Director, South East London)

"So that was kind of a change of ethos really and another thing we learnt was that being closed for three months, the two who weren't furloughed whilst they were doing food banks stuff and play packs, they spend a lot of time on site, doing jobs on site that never get done" (Interview 7, Trustee, Central England)

"Fortunately for me, there were funders out there saying write these funding applications and we managed to raise our funds to do different projects and that was more adult-related services" (Interview 6, Director, South England)

Where adventure playgrounds did not close, there was a lot more outreach work, delivering play packs and food parcels and identifying funding which meant a change in focus. This reflected the way playwork, and adventure playgrounds have had to constantly be adaptable and versatile. All participants expressed concern about not being able to see or have contact

with the children, young people and families. This reflects the importance of relationships developed by the adventure playground within the community and the need to maintain contact through outreach delivery or the use of social media.

Post-Lockdown

Table 2 shows the changes in operation to enable the adventure playground to open from July 2nd, 2020 when lockdown finished in the UK. When compared to Table 1, Table 2 shows how adventure playgrounds had to change their practice to still meet their local communities' needs.

Two key aspects were evident. First, most adventure playgrounds had to move from open access, a feature of adventure playgrounds since they first emerged after the Second World War, to becoming closed access and for most involved in this study, a bookable service. Second, the number of children attending was reduced in order to adhere to Government legislation. Closed access and the decrease in numbers are reflected in the comment below:

> "We had a 7 hour day broke into 3 slots. We changed from open access to closed access where parents had to sign in, sorry register, book and because of the track and trace system we had to make sure all children were registered before coming in. That was a bit of a shock to everyone because we've never worked like that. We went to about 15" (Interview 6, Director South England)

The thematic analysis undertaken on post-lockdown data indicates the adaptability and versatility of adventure playgrounds and the complexity of having to adapt to the government guidance, meet the needs of the community and still run a playwork provision. The analysis

identified four main headings: 1) preparation for opening; 2) reduction; 3) targeted service and 4) play behaviour.

Heading 1: Preparation for Opening

Three main themes were identified within the heading of Preparation for Opening: a) guidance searching; b) staffing, and 3) re-organisation of site. For guidance searching, the guidance within England did not specifically apply to adventure playgrounds so guidance was sought from a range of sources, including Government guidelines, networking with playwork and non-playwork organisations (e.g., Health Boards) and local schools to write Covid Play Policies and update existing policies, in particular, risk assessments:

> "We got guidance from a range of professionals who said what we can and can't do, what will happen. It's been difficult, but we have had to adhere to the rules. The way of running the playground and looking at risk benefits has changed" (Interview 13, senior playworker, North Central England).

During the lockdown, there were members of the playwork staff who were furloughed. Before re-opening in July 2020, there was staff training to provide Covid related guidance and to address any concerns returning staff may have had.

> "We always do three days of training before our summer playscheme. We ran the same kind of thing with a big focus on our risk assessment. That was done collaboratively, we did the risk assessment, the manager and I but we consulted with local primary schools" (Interview 18, Trustee, South East England).

In two cases, further staff had to be employed to adjust to a different kind of adventure playground delivery. For example, the adventure playground situated on open land:

"We had what we called a 'detached team' and employed two local young men ... the boys would be outside and working with the young people who turned up on site" (Interview 11, Senior Playworker, South West England)

Before opening in July 2020 for the summer, there was a need to address the training needs and concerns of the returning staff from being furloughed, purchase a high supply of cleaning equipment and products and update the maintenance of the adventure playground. All the adventure playgrounds had to spend time in preparation for opening to do some form of site reorganisation. This maintenance of the site involved signposting, installing equipment such as sinks and in one case the removal of structures that had worn out. The installing of sinks was part of the increased hygiene measures needed, which also included hand sanitation and spraying equipment to clean down the fixed structures and constant wiping down of equipment such as loose parts (Nicholson, 1971).

"We had time to go and buy loads and loads of PPE for everyone and cleaning materials" (Interview 13, senior playworker, North Central England).

Heading 2: Reduction

There were four themes within the heading of Reduction: a) delivery; b) playwork ethos; c) attendance, and 4) access.

Within the theme of delivery, there was some continuation of the lockdown outreach work, whilst delivery was re-organised to effect a move from open access to a bookable closed access system. The move to 'bubbles' of children, a concept introduced in the government legislation and used in schools across the UK, provided a range of attendance methods on how children and young people access their adventure playground post-March lockdown. There was a clear reduction in the number of children allowed to attend at any one time. The time that children and young people could access the adventure playground in any one day also was reduced, as reflected in the comment below:

> "children were put into bubbles of 15 per bubble and we ran two sessions a day for 2
> ½ hours each session" (Interview 15, senior playworker, South East England).

For this adventure playground, the booking system was introduced and having 'bubbles' of 15 children twice a day was maintained over the summer and only allowing children onsite. Other adventure playgrounds included adults within the numbers. Often the booking system had to be modified or in some cases did not work at all:

> "They tried that in the summer, and they've abandoned it because there was a feeling
> that it was discriminatory against families who were not quite as forward planning,
> might not have ready access to computers or the internet and it was felt that these

were children who genuinely were most likely to need it more" (Interview 4, Director South East England)

For this adventure playground, the booking system was abolished during the summer and a 'first come, first served' open access policy returned, but with a limited number of 30 children on the adventure playground at any one time. From these two extremes of open access to bookable closed access, there was the middle way where both were introduced, as described in the following comment:

> "Now we have gone back to open access first come first served at the gate on the weekdays but it is still online for the booking on the Saturdays, because that's always likely to be the busiest days" (Interview 16, Chair, West Midlands).

For other adventure playgrounds, the mixture of open and closed access worked by allowing children waiting outside to use the adventure playground to use any free booked slots. During the pre-opening preparation, some of the maintenance work involved sectioning off the adventure playground to only allow a limited number to access different areas at a time, particularly where different bubbles of children were using the site at the same time:

> "We ran it quite differently, much more structured. We had programmed activities, small bubbles of six children which we moved around the site with a member of staff. (Interview 6, manager, South West England).

This last comment about being 'more structured' was also referred to as more regimented and regulated and this relates to the reduction of the playwork ethos, where "play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated" (PPSG, 2005, Principle 2).

Under Covid restrictions, play became more controlled by the adult, and the choice was limited. Many types of play that used loose parts (Nicholson, 1971) could not be undertaken, as much of this type of play equipment could not be cleaned as quickly as the fixed-placed structures. The reduction of play equipment and space affected how children used the adventure playground:

> "Certain times, there was one or two of them that wanted the freedom, they really missed that freedom the element of just free flow to be able to hop, skip and jump to a different area. (Interview 17, manager North England).

The reduction in hours, space and resources, along with the introduction of a booking system, resulted in fewer children using the adventure playground during the summer. In addition ,the children and young people now using the provision were not always the 'regulars' who used the adventure playground before the March 2020 lockdown. This was mentioned by many of the adventure playgrounds and resulted in the next heading of developing a targeted service.

Heading Three: Targeted Service

The third heading, Targeted Service, had three main themes: a) funders; b) existing users, and 3) new users. The change to the booking service involved having to promote the adventure playground to notify changes in times, numbers and practice. Most of this was undertaken on the adventure playgrounds' own websites and social media platforms..

However, this proved to be problematic for some existing users:

> "We are so used to talking face to face or texting or Facebook messaging you, we've got a very active Facebook page, they could not just get this notion of going onto the website, they thought that by texting me they would be fine" (Interview 16, Chair West Midlands, England).

For those parents who did use the booking service, this resulted in people booking blocks of sessions, but then not turning up to use them:

> "Some people booked the whole week, we're trying to plan it, so eventually we had to put it on the website saying if you can't attend, please email us to let us know so another child can get that spot" (Interview 9, project manager, South East England).

There were also parents coordinating between themselves to book sessions so they could meet up and chat whilst their children played on the adventure playground. One result of promoting the adventure playground as a bookable service was that it created new users for the adventure playground, both residents and those who come from afar:

> "A different client group that came to us did come from a different economic background as well. The booking part brought in a different group of parents who still live locally, but these parents starting donating money to us just to use us" (Interview 6, Director, South East London).

In addition to attracting parents from different economic backgrounds, some adventure playgrounds were able to include more children diagnosed with Autism or assessed of being at risk:

"We've had so many more children who we wouldn't have seen, and we got funding from the LA to run sessions in the summer for children who were in care or on the at risk register. So local children who we were not aware of introduced in this way" (Interview 8, Manager, North Wales).

This aspect of being able to access different funding sources for the adventure playground was referred to by other participants, who were able to access some funding which was specifically play-related and other funding to develop the provision into different areas which may not have been considered before:

"Fortunately for me, there were funders out there saying write these funding applications and we managed to raise our funds to do different projects and that was more adult related services" (Interview 6, Director, South East London).

Although the re-opening of the adventure playground created opportunities for new children to use the provision and new funding opportunities, it was felt by many of the adventure playgrounds that their 'core users', those children and young people had come most weeks before the March 2020 lockdown were suddenly being excluded due to booking systems and the limited numbers who could attend at any one session:

"We've been quite reflective over the whole process and it has changed the type of children that come to the playground and we are very aware of how it appeals to the type of family that doesn't pre-book, doesn't pre-plan, doesn't go online and fill out a registration form, and we've lost those kids" (Interview 18, Trustee South East England).

This has resulted in the need to target those families and contacting them through other means, such as texting, messaging or in one case, knocking on their doors:

> "We had a person who works for us occasionally who knocked on all the doors on the local estate and came down with 15 different children each week and so we left a slot free" (Interview 13, senior playworker North England).

The re-opening of the adventure playgrounds has provided new opportunities that may not have been possible or thought of if the current Covid-19 situation had not arrived. As one participant reflected:

> "We always had this ethos of being open all the time for everybody and it's made us rethink all that, and there's value sometimes in not being open and also having closed sessions" (Interview 16, chair, West Midlands England).

Heading Four: Play Behaviour

Within the heading of Play Behaviour, there were three themes: a) return, b) friendship and c) distancing. Upon their return to the adventure playground, it was observed by the playwork staff that children appeared cautions, and were chaotic in their play but appeared to have an appreciation of the play space, as reflected in the following comments:

> "They were manic. It was great. Some of them were a bit nervous, you could tell they were a bit nervous in being with other children. They were a bit more withdrawn but that soon changed." (Interview 15, Senior Playworker, South East England)

"When we opened back up, they were going everywhere, it was like they were trying to squeeze every last inch out of the adventure playground." (Interview 8, Manager, North Wales)

The social aspect of the adventure playground was evident, particularly as children had not seen their peers or the playworkers who have developed strong relationships with the children and young people:

"The kids will sort of hang around me and just want to chat, whereas before they would go off and do something or hang out together" (Interview 1, Playworker, North England)

"They wanted children's company." (Interview 12, Manager, North Central England).

One aspect that has impacted the return of the children to the adventure playground is social distancing. For England, the 2m or 1m plus guidelines were in place, whereas in Wales, there was some relaxation concerning children under 11 years. Where social distancing was put in place, it was clear that children were not adhering to it, and the nature of play made it impossible to implement:

"We soon realized then the idea of even trying to get them to socially distance would be impossible, it would be futile, and it wouldn't be good for them or us." (Interview 14, Director, South East London)

However, there were measures and attempts to adapt children's play to promote play with social distancing:

"We asked children what they would like, and they came up with if we can't be close to each other, if we had water guns, we could play even during lockdown at a social distance sort of rule" (Interview 6, Director, Southeast England).

Discussion

The Communities of Practice concept was first introduced in the 1980s and although still evolving 30 years on (Li, Grimshaw, Nielsen, Judd, Coyte & Graham, 2009), the concept is growing (Mahajan, 2017; Smith, Hayes & Shea, 2017). With the increase in online social media and communication platforms, it is clear that "communities are linked less by location and more by common interests and goals" (Li, Grimshaw, Nielsen, Judd, Coyte & Graham, 2009, p. 3). In addition, CoP are "not stable or static entities. They evolve as new members join and others leave" (Roberts, 2006, p.625) , and change when new 'real-world' problems are experienced. This was demonstrated during lockdown where many adventure playgrounds became an outreach provision, supplying food and play resources and keeping contact through texting and social media platforms as "sharing knowledge, a CoP can be useful in developing new ideas and new strategies" (Mohajan, 2017, p. 15).

The re-opening of adventure playgrounds in July 2020 provided a 'real-life problem' that adventure playgrounds had to address. This marked new unchartered territory concerning lack of specific guidance and a move from the traditionally open access to more closed access. The 12 Key Elements for adventure playgrounds (PE, 2017) provide common objectives that reflect a CoP, and these are considered concerning the results of this study in

light of the real-world problem of Covid-19 and lockdown and having to develop 'new strategies to continue to run play provision within communities.

What was clearly demonstrated in this study is how versatile and adaptable playworkers have been to modify their practice, the play space and activities on adventure playgrounds, so that children and young people could meet up and play with their peers.

Although there is variation in the CoP theory (Cox, 2005), the main principles outlined by Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) that define 'Community of Practice' (those of a domain, community, and practice) remain constant. As Wenger-Trayner and Wenger Trayner (2015) stated:

> It's the combination of these three elements that constitutes a community of practice. And it is by developing these three elements in parallel that one cultivates such a community (p. 2).

It has been suggested that playwork settings are an example of a Community of Practice (CoP) (King & Newstead, 2019). From this study, it is clear that 'community is still a key aspect of the adventure playground movement, and how shared thinking between practitioners has enabled adventure playgrounds to continue post-March 2020 lockdown despite the lack of Government guidance. The problem of re-opening relied more on shared ideas than from Government guidelines. For example, the sharing of ideas through London Play (2020) and online meetings enabled adventure playgrounds to adapt both practice and the provision, but still stay as 'true' as possible to the adventure playground principles reflected in the 12 Key Elements (2017). The role of the adventure playground worker

reflected the role of the participants in a CoP "advice and help each other solve problems" (Smith, Hays & Shea, 2017, p. 213).

When the adventure playgrounds re-opened, the less 'tech-savvy' regular users, as one interviewee referred to them, were still contacted through texting and also door knocking to ensure that children and young people could still access the provision. This demonstrates the importance of key element 9:"The playground is at the heart of the community" (PE, 2017, p.3). Whether through lockdown outreach work or adaptation of the provision post-lockdown, children, young people, and their families have been at the heart of what adventure playgrounds offer and continue to be to support communities.

The re-opening of adventure playgrounds has been a challenge since the March 2020 lockdown in terms of some of the key elements, such as number 3) Opportunities to engage in the full range of play types as chosen by children, and number 4) Exploration of physical, social, emotional, imaginary, symbolic and sensory spaces, which have been limited by hygiene or social distancing limitations. This has created challenges for playwork practice (PPSG, 2005) and for many adventure playground workers has meant a change in thinking and re-focusing their practice, and even in some cases an evaluation of the playwork ethos. This change in the playwork ethos relates to the 'fluid' nature of CoP, which are never static or stable entities (Roberts, 2006), and how playworkers have to be constantly adaptable (King, 2021).

Since the start of this study, the UK has been placed in another two lockdowns, and adventure playgrounds have once again had to close and re-open. This puts a strain on adventure playgrounds that rely on funding grants to meet specific objectives, although this

study has shown how flexible funders and adventure playgrounds have been for practice to still be provided in one guise or another. The number of adventure playgrounds has decreased since the 1970s, and the current estimate of 147 adventure playgrounds in the UK (Conway, personal communication) is at risk of further decrease if funding is not made available. However, the 12 key elements for adventure playgrounds (PlayEngland, 2017) may need to be reviewed in the light of pre- and post-Covid lockdown experiences of providing services on adventure playgrounds.

The strength of this study is that it provides an important contemporaneous account of how adventure playgrounds continue to support children and their communities, despite the challenges of Covid-19 restrictions. Rather than rely on retrospective data, this study was prospective and undertaken whilst adventure playgrounds were having to adapt to changes.

Limitations

A limitation of the study is that the views are from adventure playgrounds workers and not the users, the children, and parents. With children and young people experiencing repeated lockdowns, the need for outdoor space to meet and play, and the benefits to children and young people need to be empirically evidenced, and therefore capturing children's and communities' experiences of adventure playground provision is important Future studies could also aim to increase the number and diversity of participants who take part in the research.

Conclusion

Adventure playgrounds have provided a service to the community since they first operated in the UK after the Second World War. They have developed into an important Community of Practice (CoP) which has enabled them to still operate both during lockdown and post-lockdown in the UK. Covid-19 restrictions have resulted in a reduction of provision and users on adventure playgrounds. However, it has also enabled a rethink of practice to support both existing and new users to the adventure playground. Developing strategies and skills related to the Communities of Practice concept may help to strengthen the role of adventure playgrounds in supporting children and young people in their play, and the families within the communities they serve, during future pandemic restrictions and post-pandemic.

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Location	Access	Opening Times	Age Range	Attendance	Staff	Additional to play
North-West, England **Interview 1-3**	Open	Term time Monday to Friday 4.15 pm to 6pm Holiday Also 10am to 12 noon and 4.15 to 6pm	4-17	50-60	3	Registered to run Forest School Provision Community Outreach Used by Local Schools Provide Food daily
South-East, England **Interview 4**	Open	Term-Time Wed-Friday 3.30pm to 7pm and open access Holiday Monday-Friday 10.30 am to 4 pm and open access	6-16	50	5 core Sessional or contracted	Food if doing a cooking activity
South-West, England **Interview 5**	Open in Holidays Only	Holiday 12 noon to 3pm in one of three adventure playgrounds	All ages although under 7 need to be supervised	50-60	5 core Volunteers	Food if doing a cooking activity
South-East, England **Interview 6-7**	Open	Term time Tuesday to Friday 4-7pm, Saturday 12 noon to 5pm and open access Holiday Monday to Friday 10 am to 5pm and open access	5-15	30-60 term time Up to 120 in holiday	2 core 10 sessional	Registered with Ofsted Sessions for girls only Over 10 (Youth Group) sessions for Forest School and Team Building Provide Food
North, Wales **Interview 8**	Open	Term-time Tuesday to Friday 4pm to 7.30 pm, Saturday 1pm to 6pm and open access Holidays Tuesday to Saturday 1pm to 7.30 pm and open access	5 upwards	40-60 term time 150-200 holiday	4 core Volunteers	Registered with CIW Flying Start Provision Alternative Learning Project Provides food if donated
South-East, England	Open	Term Time Monday to Friday 3.30pm to 6.30 pm	8-15 (under 7 has to come with adult)	20-50	2 core staff 4 Part-time	Provide Food

Interview 9		Saturday Holiday Monday to Friday 11.30am to 5pm		Up to 150		
South-West, England **Interview 10-11**	Open Public Land	Term Time Monday to Friday 3.30pm to 6.00 pm Holiday Monday to Friday 10.30am to 3.30pm	7 upwards	25-40 80-100	1 Full-time 3 Part-time	Cheap Tuck Shop
North-Central, England **Interview 12-13**	Open	Term Time Tuesday to Friday 3.15pm to 6.15 pm Saturday 10.30am to 3.30pm Holiday Tuesday to Friday 12.30am to 3.30pm Saturday 10.30am to 3.30pm	8-13	40-60 150	6 core staff Casual Staff (16-17 year olds)	Food if cooking done as an activity
South-East, England **Interview, 14**	Open (2 sites)	Term Time Monday to Friday 3.15pm to 6pm (6pm to 8pm youth club Thursday) Saturday 11.30am to 4pm Monday (stay and play U6s and not free) Tuesday to Friday 3.30 pm to 6pm (6pm to 8pm youth club Wednesday) Saturday 11am to 4pm Holiday Monday to Saturday 11am to 5.30pm Monday to Saturday 11 am to 5.30pm	6-15	70-80 term time Up to 100 in holiday	3 outdoor 3 outdoor 3 indoor	Volunteers do site maintenance and LA check site (but not Ofsted registered) Specific sessions for disabled children Specific Youth Sessions Sometimes provides Food
South-East, England **Interview 15**	Open	Term time Tuesday to Friday 4-7pm, Saturday 12 noon to 5pm and open access Holiday Monday to Friday 10 am to 5pm and open access	5-15	30-60 term time	2 core 10 sessional	Ofsted Registered Sessions for disabled children Food Provided

				Up to 120 in holiday		
West Midlands, England **Interview 16**	Open	Term Time Tuesday to Friday 3.30pm to 6.30pm Saturday Holiday Tuesday to Saturday 10.30am to 2pm and 3pm to 6pm	7-18	Up to 250 Up to 600	3 Full-Time 1 youth development worker 5 sessional youth	Specific Youth Session Alternative Curriculum Provision Pre-School Sessions School Visits Referral Visits Specific sessions for disabled children Food
North, England **Interview 17**	Open	Term time Monday to Friday 3.30pm to 5.30pm (summer could do 6pm to 9pm or 5pm to 7pm) Holiday Monday to Saturday 12 noon to 5pm	5-13	20-40 Up to 180	5 full-time equivalents 5 part-time	Community Outreach Lead Play Partnership Provide Food Parents often Attend
South East, England **Interview 18**	Open (9 Months of the Year)	Term Time (Easter to Oct) Monday to Friday 3.15pm to 5.15 pm Saturday (Hired Out) Holiday (Easter to Oct) Monday to Friday 10am to 4pm Saturday (Hired Out)	7-14	15-20 200-300	3 paid staff (Part-time) 8-9 volunteers	Youth Provision Hire out space at weekends Food if doing cooking activities

Table 1: Demographics for Adventure Playgrounds Pre-March 2020 Lockdown

Location	Access	Opening Times	Changes in Attendance
North- West England **Interview 1-3**	Open	Term time Monday to Friday 4.15 pm to 6pm Holiday Also 10am to 12 noon and 4.15 to 6pm	Numbers limited to first come first served basis of up to 30 children
South-East England **Interview 4**	Closed at first then returned to Open	Holiday Monday-Friday 10.30 am to 4 pm and open access Term-Time Wed-Friday 3.30pm to 7pm and open access	Started with 1 staff with a 'bubble' of 6 children then moved back to open access, first come first served basis with children lining up and maximum of 45. Children are registered in and out
South-West England **Interview 5**	Closed	Holiday 10am to 12 noon sessions bookable	15 children of 3 'bubbles' of 5 then changed to 1 'bubble' of 15
South-East England **Interview 6-7**	Closed	Holiday in July Monday to Saturday 2 x 2 ½ sessions a day and bookable: 10.30 to 1pm and 2pm to 4.30pm Term-time (open access) Tuesday to Saturday Tuesday & Thursday Primary 3.30 to 6pm Wednesday & Friday Secondary 3.30 to 6pm Saturday 12.30 to 5pm	15 children in a 'bubble' with 6 'bubble' groups 20 children (in groups of 10 in each play area)
North Wales **Interview 8**	Closed at first then returned to Open	Holidays Tuesday to Saturday 1pm to 3pm, 4pm to 6 pm and open access	Initially in groups of 8 attending different sessions then 2 sessions a day of 2 hours capped at 30 children which changed to under 11 session for 2 hours and over 11 session for 2 hours capped at 30 per session

		Term time Tuesday to Friday 4pm to 6 pm (u11) and 6.30 pm to 8.30 pm (11+) and open access	
South-East England **Interview 9**	Closed	Holiday in July Monday to Saturday 2 x 2 ½ sessions a day and bookable: 10.30 to 1pm and 2pm to 4.30pm Term-time (open access) Tuesday to Saturday Tuesday & Thursday Primary 3.30 to 6pm Wednesday & Friday Secondary 3.30 to 6pm Saturday 12.30 to 5pm	15 children in a 'bubble' with 6 'bubble' groups 20 children (in groups of 10 in each play area)
South-West England **Interview 10-11**	Open	Term Time Monday to Friday 3.30pm to 6.00 pm Holiday Monday to Friday 10.30am to 3.30pm	Core group of 20 boys (open access as open land)
North Central **Interview 12-13**	Closed	Term Time Tuesday to Friday 3.15pm to 6.15 pm Saturday 10.30am to 3.30pm Holiday Monday to Friday 11am to 1pm and 2pm to 4pm	Not running 2 x 2 hour sessions a day with 20-25 people (included adult per household) which had to be booked but any gap could be filled (open access)
South-East England **Interview 14**	Closed	Term Time Monday to Friday 3.15pm to 6 (8pm youth club on Thursday) Saturday 11.30 am to 4pm	20 each session term time now reduced to 15 split up into 3 sessions 2.15pm to 3.15 pm (opposite school) then 3.30pm to 4.30pm and then 5pm to 6pm

		Monday to Friday 3.30pm to 6pm (8pm youth club on Wednesday) Saturday 11am to 4pm	20 each session in holiday now reduced to 15 Split up into 3 sessions: 10am to 12.30pm, 1pm to 2.30pm and 3.30pm to 5.30pm
		Holiday Monday to Friday 11am to 5.30 pm, Saturday 11.30 am to 4pm Monday to Friday 11pm to 5.30 pm, Saturday 11am to 4pm	
South-East England **Interview 15**	Closed	Holiday in July Monday to Saturday 2 x 2 ½ sessions a day and bookable: 10.30 to 1pm and 2pm to 4.30pm	15 children in a 'bubble' with 6 'bubble' groups
		Term-time (open access) Tuesday to Saturday Tuesday & Thursday Primary 3.30 to 6pm Wednesday & Friday Secondary 3.30 to 6pm Saturday 12.30 to 5pm	20 children (in groups of 10 in each play area)
West Midlands **Interview 16**	Closed then mixture of Open and Closed	Term Time Tuesday to Friday 3.30pm to 6.30pm Saturday	20 children including any parent for 1 hour and bookable Moved to 30 children for 1 ½ hours and Open Access Monday to Friday Saturday is bookable
		Holiday Tuesday to Saturday 10.30am to 2pm and 3pm to 6pm	
North England **Interview 17**	Closed	Term time Monday to Friday 3.30pm to 5.30pm (summer could do 6pm to 9pm or 5pm to 7pm)	4 Bubbles with 5 children in each bubble

		Holiday Monday to Saturday 12 noon to 5pm	
South East **Interview 18**	Closed	Term Time (Easter to Oct) Monday to Friday 3.15pm to 5.15 pm Saturday (Hired Out)	After school year groups (bookable) but open access if any spaces are available and child registered.
		Holiday (Easter to Oct) Monday to Friday 10am to 12 noon, then 2pm to 4pm Saturday (Hired Out)	2 x 2 hour Bubbles with 15 children in each (total 60 a day), no adults (bookable), but open access for spaces allowed (2 hour break for cleaning). No bubbles were filled so ended up as one large bubble

Table 2: Demographics for Adventure Playgrounds Post-March 2020 Lockdown

Heading	Theme	Sub-Themes
Preparation for Opening	Guidance Searching	Construct Covid Policy Update Risk Benefit Analysis Networking local and national bodies Work with Local Schools
	Staffing	Returning furloughed staff Address Covid concerns Covid related training Recruit staff
	Re-organisation of site	Update Maintenance Section off outside space Signpost Implement hygiene measure
Reduction	Delivery	Lockdown outreach work Introduce booking system and bubbles Registration and re-registration
	Playwork Ethos	More structured More regimented More regulated
	Attendance	Increase in parents attending Decrease in regular users Decrease in older children
	Access	Change from open access to closed access Only outdoor space
	Resources	Less loose parts Less types of play
Targeted Service	Funders	Meet existing funders needs Identify New funding streams
	Existing Users	Continued outreach work Text and phone parents Parents co-ordinated
	New Users	Promoting service on social media Implementing new initiatives Meeting needs of different children
Play Behaviour	Return	Cautious Chaotic Appreciation of the space
	Friendship	With peers With staff
	Distancing	Adaptation of play to 2 m Lack of social distancing

Table 3: Thematic Analysis on Key Headings, Themes and Sub-themes post-lockdown

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