

Section A

The fields in this section are mandatory.

Institution: Leeds Beckett University

Unit of Assessment: 20

Title of case study: The transformational impact of playwork on the lives of disadvantaged

Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000 to 2020

Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:

Name(s):
Fraser Brown

Role(s) (e.g. job title):
Professor

**Period(s) employed by
submitting HEI:**
1994 to Sep 2020

Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2010 to 2020

Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N

Section B

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

Brown's research has been pivotal in the growth of the playwork profession and the rise of better play opportunities for children. The impact of the research in this period is evident in changes to professional practice and public sector policies in the UK and around the world. This impact has resulted in enhanced training of students going into professionals working with children, to enable them to understand the importance of play for the children with whom they work. It is also evident in improved quality of life for young people as a result of those changes in practice and policies.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

Brown's research team set out to give a voice to children (3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6). The aim of this research has been to make the case for play in the lives of the most disadvantaged, and to change practice and policy so that professionals understand the importance of play.

The first project concerned a therapeutic intervention with a group of abandoned children living in a Romanian pediatric hospital, which took place between 2000 and 2005 (3.1, 3.2). The children, ranging in age from one to ten years old, had suffered chronic neglect and abuse. They had previously spent most of their lives tied in the same cot in the same hospital ward. Although able to see and hear the other abused children, they experienced little social interaction. The project used play-based therapeutic methods to aid the children's recovery and development, e.g. joining, symbolic representation, negative capability, and highlighting the significance of play cues. Despite the success of these focused techniques, the most powerful healing factor was the unfettered playful interaction between the children themselves.

The second project (3.3) investigated the special circumstances of Roma children's early years' education and support needs, with particular reference to the high level of exclusion experienced by members of the communities in Central and Eastern Europe. It explored the impact on households of the social determinants of health which potentially affect child development and well-being. A number of case-studies were used to illustrate how agencies in various countries have developed strategies to encourage Roma children to engage with education opportunities. The project concluded that there is a mismatch between the ambitions of government agencies and the reality of life on the ground.

The third project (3.4, 3.5) hypothesised that children's nurses are not well trained in the art of playing with children in their care. The mixed methods approach combined longitudinal focus groups with student nurses and content analysis of the Programme Specifications of university children's nursing courses in the UK. Only 17% of Programme Specifications cited play. Where play was mentioned it largely referred to it as a health procedure, such as preparing children for operations, or distracting them from injections, etc. There was little mention of the multi-faceted developmental benefits of children's play, nor of its widely acknowledged therapeutic healing properties. The feedback from the students confirmed the low priority given to the subject of children's play within children's nurse education.

Finally, a monograph (3.6) explored the tensions that exist between play and playwork, including appropriate definitions and the conflict around the role of the adult. It proposed a play-to-playwork continuum, where playing can be considered a 'developmental and evolutionary' activity, and playwork a 'compensatory' activity. It was structured around aspects considered by the author as most important for playwork, and used stories of children playing to illuminate a range of play and playwork theories. The stories, drawn from the casebooks of eminent and experienced playworkers, largely spoke for themselves whilst at the same time triggering theoretical explorations.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

3.1 Brown, F. (2014a) The Healing Power of Play: therapeutic work with chronically neglected and abused children. *Children Journal, Special Issue: The Role of Play in Children's Health and Development*. Vol.1, pp.474-488; DOI:10.3390/children1030474
Peer-reviewed journal article.

3.2 Brown, F. (2020) Case Study: Therapeutic Playwork with Abandoned and Abused Children in a Romanian Paediatric Hospital. In: *Report 17: Wellbeing and Nurture: Physical and Emotional Security in Childhood*. All-Party Parliamentary Group on a Fit and Healthy Childhood

3.3 Brown, F. & Greenfields, M. (2018) "Roma Children and Early Childhood Education: A Story of Discrimination" In: Roopnarine, J., Johnson, J., Quinn, S. & Patte, M. (eds) *International Handbook of Early Childhood Education*.
Peer-reviewed book chapter.

3.4 Stonehouse, D., Piper, C., Briggs, M. & Brown, F. (2018) Play Within the Pre-registration Children's Nursing Curriculum: A Content Analysis of Programme Specifications. *Pediatric Nursing* Vol.44.3, pp.33-38; DOI: 10.1016/j.pedn.2018.01.013
Peer-reviewed journal article.

3.5 Brown, F., Dell Clark, C. & Patte, M. (2018) "Therapeutic Work with Children in Diverse Settings" In: Rubin L. (ed) *Handbook of Medical Play Therapy and Child Life: Interventions in Clinical and Medical Settings*. New York, NY: Routledge
Peer-reviewed book chapter

3.6 Brown, F. (2014b) *Play and Playwork: 101 Stories of Children Playing*. Maidenhead: Open University Press
Monograph.

This is all work of international to world-class importance: all have been scored internally as 3*, with 2.6 between 3* and 4*.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words).

Brown has developed a considerable body of work focused around his research with abandoned and abused children in the Transylvania region of Romania, especially those from the Roma communities. The work includes both therapeutic practice and empirical research, which has had an impact on professional practice and public policy in the UK, and in a number of countries around the world, including Romania and the USA. There are four impacts evidenced here: on pedagogy and professional practice; on public policy in the UK; on children and practice in Romania; and on the playground industry in the UK.

Brown's research has played a central role in the development of both the theory and practice of the profession of playwork. The pedagogical focus on children and play has led to development of undergraduate playwork courses, and postgraduate play therapy courses at Leeds Beckett University. The research in this period has impacted on the training of hundreds of playwork professionals.

This research has shaped pedagogy, training and practice. An American Professor (5.1) described Brown's research documenting the impact of a playwork project on a group of children in a Romanian pediatric hospital (3.1, 3.3), as "the most life-changing session that I ever experienced". It led to that same professor undertaking a Fulbright Fellowship under Professor Brown's tutelage, and subsequently to the establishment of both Playwork and Child Life Specialist 'minors' at Bloomsburg University, Pennsylvania. A leading American psychotherapist (5.2) recently described Brown's work as having "altered ideas in psychology about child development" and "of great relevance to anyone working in the field with people of any age." The research in this period has provided the best practice that has helped develop the Child Mental Health Charter (5.3). This was co-published in 2019 by Play Therapists UK and the All Party Parliamentary Group for a Fit and Healthy Childhood, with Brown's crucial support. It allows individuals and organisations to sign-up to a programme of commitments that improve children's mental health. It has 1000 individual signatories and over 100 organisations.

Brown provided a Case Study on Therapeutic Playwork with Abandoned and Abused Children in a Romanian Paediatric Hospital (3.2) in *Report 17: Wellbeing and Nurture: Physical and Emotional Security in Childhood*. This was published by All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on a Fit and Healthy Childhood and is evidence that the research has had an impact on policy, as it draws on the research projects 3.1 and 3.6. The other research projects here (3.3, 3.4, 3.5) were influential in Brown's Case Study to the APPG. All the research influenced Brown's involvement with the policy work of the APPG on three reports: Mental Health in Childhood (5.4), The Impact of Social and Economic Inequalities on Children's Health (5.5), and Children's Mental Health Beyond the Green Paper: The Role of Practice Based Evidence (5.6). His research was used by the UK Government as a standard text in connection with their National Play Strategy (5.7).

The *Aid for Romanian Children* (ARC) charitable trust was established as a direct response to the outcomes of Brown's research. It has provided food, clothing, shelter, medicines and Christmas boxes for the children. Life for these children is a constant struggle. ARC has also organised summer camps. While working with the children Brown also conducted a research project studying their play behaviours, asking the specific question, 'are these children play deprived?' (which has been used in 3.6). This observational study highlighted the striking contrast between the children's absolute generational poverty and the general enthusiasm with which they played. Professor Brown concluded that the usual niceties of privacy, personal possessions and property boundaries were apparently irrelevant. The children's play was rich in imagination and creativity - living proof of Nicholson's 'theory of loose parts'.

A keynote presentation on this work of Brown at the ARC was seen by the CEO of the playground equipment manufacturer, Sutcliffe Play, who was concerned that children in the UK were becoming 'play deprived'. In particular, he was concerned about the barren nature of school playgrounds. His company attempted to address this via a new product line, based on the 'loose parts' theme (5.8). This has now been sold around the world to create an economic impact as well as one on the wellbeing of children. Sutcliffe Play have funded Professor Brown to conduct a new study of the long-term impact of the new product in two school playgrounds, and the Eureka Children's Museum in Halifax, which shows the impact will continue beyond this cycle.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of ten references)

This section should list sources external to the submitting HEI that could, if requested by panels, provide corroboration of specific claims made in the case study. Sources provided in this section should not be a substitute for providing clear evidence of impact in Section B4; the information in this section will be used for audit purposes only.

5.1 Bloomsburg University's *Playwork 'Minor'*: [Online]

Available from <https://bloomu.edu/playwork-minor>

5.2 Association for the Healing Power of the Imagination - *The Child Emerging Conference* [Online]

Available from: <http://metamorfosinstitute.blogspot.com/2018/01/>

5.3 Child Mental Health Charter [Online]

Available from: <https://childmentalhealthcharter.com/>

5.4 Mental Health in Childhood. *The All-Party Parliamentary Group on a Fit and Healthy Childhood*, 26 June 2018

5.5 The Impact of Social and Economic Inequalities on Children's Health. *The All-Party Parliamentary Group on a Fit and Healthy Childhood*, 28 March 2018

5.6 Children's Mental Health Beyond the Green Paper: The Role of Practice Based Evidence. *The All-Party Parliamentary Group on a Fit and Healthy Childhood*, 29 January 2019

5.7 Play. *The All-Party Parliamentary Group on a Fit and Healthy Childhood*, 22 October 2015

5.8 Sutcliffe Play – Snug product

Available from: <https://www.sutcliffeplay.co.uk/equipment/snug-core-kit/>