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Second “Playwork Campference” 15th-18th February 2019 brings international experts on children's play to discuss unconventional approaches to risk and inclusion

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HOUSTON, TX: On a three acre site in West Houston, children ages 6 to 13, many with learning differences and communication delays, have constructed a three-acre homemade playground of their dreams. This past year marked a decade of growth and change for the site, which was founded in 2008 and was recently filmed by Alliance for Childhood for their exemplary practices. “Even people who already know about adventure playgrounds often don't know that Houston has one of the very best in the world,” says Morgan Leichter-Saxby of Pop-Up Adventure Play, a non-for-profit which provides training in Playwork practice. “We couldn't be happier to be partnering with Jill Wood and The Parish School to deliver this totally unique event.”

The last decade has seen a rise in interest in ‘free play’, with Peter Gray speaking to the benefits of self-directed learning and Richard Louv arguing that children’s loss of outdoor play has led to a modern epidemic of ‘nature deficit disorder’. NASA has emphasized children’s need for unstructured time in which to practice skills of motivation and creative thinking, while the American Association of Pediatrics released a series of reports on play’s central importance for a child’s healthy development. However, studies show an unprecedented loss of children’s time and opportunity for self-directed play, due to a shift in public perceptions of risk. Possible responses to this have been explored in recent articles for the Atlantic, in the New York Times, and Erin Davis's 2014 documentary [The Land](#), which have all focused on the ‘adventure playground’ model’.

Since WW2, thousands of adventure playgrounds have provided opportunities for children’s self-directed play in the United Kingdom, Japan and Europe, providing children with space and

tools such as hammers and nails. Many sites include fire. Until recently very few existed in North America, but this model has recently become popular with sites springing up in New York City, Los Angeles, and Houston. However, public reporting has frequently missed the question of Playwork, or the professional work of staffing these sites safely.

“Playwork is special” says Jill Wood, one of the two keynote speakers. “It’s what makes adventure playgrounds function even more safely than other kinds of playgrounds”. Playwork, which can be studied at the University level in the UK, is an explicitly non-educational approach which emphasizes risk-benefit assessment and low-interventionist support methods. Studies have evidenced its strong therapeutic potential. However, no formal Playwork professional training programs currently exist in North America.

Pop-Up Adventure Play has been stepping into that gap, providing online training and the first Playwork Campference in 2017, which attracted 90 play advocates from 7 different countries. Participant feedback stated that "...campference was a completely unforgettable experience. Unlike other conferences where it is just info after info I felt able to really think and reflect and resonate on what I was learning." The first event was so well received that preparations for the second Playwork Campference are well underway, to happen on 15th-18th February 2019.

“Playwork is in the limelight right now,” says Suzanna Law of Pop-Up Adventure Play. “People in schools and parks and hospitals... we want to bring everyone together to talk about making a real change... this is the only place to get it right now.” Ali Wood, playwork expert from the UK and co-author of *Reflective Playwork: For All Who Work with Children*, will be providing a final keynote on 18th February. A gathering on Saturday, 16th February, will be open to the public who are also welcome to tour the event’s art exhibition, entitled *Reflections*.

Campference participants will be camping on the adventure playground at The Parish School for the 4-day, 3 night event, a space that consists of three acres of grassland covered by child-made structures. They'll have full access to the site along with bonfires, Texas bbq, and lively discussions around children’s play.

**Registration information can be found [here](#) / Facebook event [here](#) / #Campference2019
Early Bird ends 31st October**

About The Parish School/BCP

Founded in 2008, Adventure Play at The Parish School is one of only a handful of site-based adventure playgrounds in the United States. The playground serves both children of The Parish School, who have communication delays and learning differences, and community children from throughout Houston, ages 6-12.

Bayou City Play is a group of Houston-based educators, artists, and therapists at the ready to collaborate with metro-area partners on child-directed play opportunities. We have a trailer full of supplies and a team of passionate child advocates with training in the playwork approach.

About Pop-Up Adventure Play

Since 2010, Pop-Up Adventure Play has worked to translate the principles and practices of Playwork for application in schools, neighborhoods, museums, parks, and anywhere else that children can be found. We believe that children have the right to play as they please, and that a place that supports children's play benefits everyone. Operating primarily in the US and UK, we provide long-distance and in-person support all around the world.

About Adventure Playgrounds & Playwork

The UK-based professional approach known as Playwork grew from the post-WW2 Adventure Playground movement. These are places stocked with recycled loose parts or scrap material. Trained staff, or Playworkers, work in low-interventionist ways to help children construct and experience physical, emotional and social risks in play at their own pace. Playworkers also support children's play in other locations such as hospitals, schools, public parks, and libraries.



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