


 Childhood

Young Children's Views on Play Provision in two Local Parks: A research project by early childhood studies students and staff

Journal:	<i>Childhood</i>
Manuscript ID	CHD-18-0068.R1
Manuscript Type:	Original Manuscript
Keywords:	Children's Views, Play provision, risky play, Research with children, Student / Staff research
Abstract:	This project collected the views of young children on play provision within two local parks through research conducted by Early Childhood Studies students and academics. Findings identified that traditional playground equipment and 'risky' play were important for children. Natural features and semi-permanent provision were valued, alongside the provision of mixed age fixed equipment. Children were highly aware of health and safety and they were very risk-averse. Conclusions recognised constraints and limitations of collaborative working, including eliciting authentic voices of children.

SCHOLARONE™
Manuscripts

Young Children's Views on Play Provision in two Local Parks: A research project by early childhood studies students and staff

Abstract:

This project collected the views of young children on play provision within two local parks through research conducted by Early Childhood Studies students and academics. Findings identified that traditional playground equipment and 'risky' play were important for children. Natural features and semi-permanent provision were valued, alongside the provision of mixed age fixed equipment. Children were highly aware of health and safety and they were very risk-averse. Conclusions recognised constraints and limitations of collaborative working, including eliciting authentic voices of children.

Key words

Children's voices, play provision, risky play, research with children, student/ staff research

1. Introduction and background to the study

The authors of this paper were approached by a local district council landscape architect who was responsible for the upgrade of two local parks in the East Midlands in the UK. The council wished to consult with children on their views of existing provision in the parks and their play interests to shape and inform the upgrade of these spaces. The authors, having gained permission to do so, provided undergraduate students on a BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies degree, with an opportunity to engage in primary research with young children in a local community to elicit their views. Collaborative research between staff and students is gaining popularity as it provides an opportunity to renegotiate power relationships and meanings between students and staff within the current climate of higher education (Bellinger, et al., 2014; Jensen & Bennet, 2016). The project took place in the autumn of 2015 when the students were in the final year of their degree and all were studying an option module entitled Creative Opportunities and Possibilities; an assessed component of this module required them to evaluate an outdoor space for creative play potential.

This paper aims to contribute towards the literature around the design of outdoor play spaces for children by providing insight into children's views about local provision and their play choices and interests. The paper also makes a methodological contribution through reflection, on the complexities involved in eliciting children's views and the limitations of involving students in research. The approach taken to hand over the methodological design to the students was innovative but not without complications and shortcomings.

Our starting point is to recognise and value the importance of listening to children's views when designing and constructing the community spaces they inhabit. As Loebach (2011:1) states,

1
2
3
4 In theory, children have the right, enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of
5 the Child, to be involved in decisions which affect their lives including the
6 empowering experience of contributing to the design of their local environments. In
7 practice however, providing children with this opportunity through participatory work
8 is fraught with challenges, particularly the employment of effective methods for
9 meaningfully involving children in the process.
10
11
12

13 The authors acknowledged Loebach's concerns but nevertheless felt this was a rare
14 opportunity to make a difference for children and to involve students in an 'authentic task'.
15 The perceived decline in children's opportunities to play freely in the UK (Gill, 2008) and, also,
16 internationally, (Nicholson et al., 2015) make it, therefore, imperative that children's views on
17 spaces provided for this purpose is sought.
18
19
20

21 **2. Literature informing the project**

22 ***2.1 Children's rights and voice***

23
24
25
26 Childhood is both socially constructed and non-universal (James & Prout, 1997) which
27 complicates research that purports to elicit children's ideas, as it can only produce a partial
28 picture constrained by time and culture and inter-sectioned by class, gender and ethnicity
29 (Alanen, 2016). In addition, the power difference between adults and children makes eliciting
30 authentic views difficult (Spyrou, 2011), nevertheless, the rights of children to be heard in
31 matters concerning them is pivotal to their participation in a democratic society (Carroll et al,
32 2017). The UNCRC (1989) Article 12, refers to the right of the child to express their views
33 freely in matters affecting them, however, children are not uniformly consulted on their views
34 in relation to the design of spaces provided for them by adults. The privileged position of
35 adults has meant that children's ideas are often discounted as the ideas of adults dominate
36 discourse and are 'heard, privileged and counted as knowledge or truths' (Nicholson et al,
37 2015:1571) whereas the voices of children are 'systematically hidden from view,
38 marginalised and excluded from circulation' (Nicholson et al, 2015:1571). Listening to the
39 voices of young children needs careful consideration and has included the uptake of
40 innovative approaches (Clark & Moss, 2001) but capturing children's authentic ideas remains
41 complex due their 'messy, multi-layered and non-normative' character (Spyrou, 2011:151).
42 The idea of children as active participants in research reflects the emergence of the social
43 studies of childhood, this includes contributions from disciplines such as history,
44 anthropology and sociology (Hendrick in James and Prout, 1997; Qvortrup, 1991; Mayall,
45 2002; Punch, 2002). These contributions, in particular, have supported the notion of children
46 as active citizens with their own agency and therefore, worthy of study in their own right.
47 These ideas demonstrate the shift in focus from the child as object to the child as subject
48 within research (Gillett-Swan & Sargeant, 2018).
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58

59 ***2.2 Children's views and preferences on play provision***

60

1
2
3
4
5 An increasing number of studies have considered children's views on play provision in recent
6 years, identifying children's interest in risky play and challenge. Children's preference for
7 challenging equipment offering sensations of height and speed including slides, swings,
8 climbing equipment and monkey bars, have been identified by Little and Eager (2010). Play
9 which allows children to feel out of control and on the edge of risk is labelled as dizzy play
10 by Tovey (2007) but is often constrained by adult perceptions of danger or limited by the
11 equipment itself (Wilson, 2012). Glenn et al., (2012) identify interest in the use of re-
12 purposed spaces for children's own uses, rather than traditional fixed play provision; they
13 suggest the key barriers to children's play choices are parents' risk averse attitudes and
14 concerns about safety. Weather was found to influence children's choices of play, but not
15 outdoor play itself; outdoor activities, active, movement-based activities and playing with
16 peers were important for the children in their study (Glenn et al., 2012). In Auckland, New
17 Zealand, children's voices were sought on the redesign of an urban space to enable child-
18 friendly space and open-up play opportunities. The children's contributions in the redesign
19 resulted in a shift in the adult perceptions of a 'child-friendly' environment which 'was more
20 about providing sensory, play and socializing opportunities than restraining and constraining
21 behaviours' (Carroll et al 2017:286). This suggests that adult and children's conceptions of
22 what constitutes child friendly spaces differ, a view supported by Firinci Orman
23 (2013) who reports a cross generational difference between adults' and children's
24 perspectives on playground design. Firinci Orman (2013) utilized participatory approaches
25 using art activities in the 'My Dream Playground Workshop' in Bulgaria, for children to
26 design their own playgrounds. The workshops made use of the Mosaic Approach (Clark and
27 Moss, 2001) and were based on five playground dimensions: joy, design, safety, nature and
28 socialization. Firinci Orman (2013) also notes the ideology embedded in playground design
29 in 20th century Bulgaria, including rocket designs and double seated swings, reflecting the
30 social moral code of the time.

31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40 Places for climbing and places for resting were identified in Loebach's (2011) research as
41 was the use of colour in the design of a wall mural. Children gained ownership of the space
42 by contributing to the design through various art projects such as making their own stepping
43 stones for use within a pathway, or painting their own section of a wall mural. (Loebach,
44 2011). Horgan et al (2018) identify that free play was the most popular after school activity
45 for the 177 children aged 5-12 years of age within their study. Children valued being able to
46 relax with friends in unstructured environments and being treated appropriately for their age.
47 What is common in these studies is the opportunity for choice in activities and the ownership
48 of space by children, which includes the re-purposing of space and resources from the child's
49 agenda.

50 51 52 53 54 **2.3 Risk and challenge in children's play**

55
56
57 Risk is socially constructed and varies according to context and culture (Tovey, 2007),
58 however, it is agreed by contemporary authors that risk and challenge are important in
59 children's outdoor play spaces (Gill, 2008; Tovey, 2007; Casey, 2007; Wilson, 2012; Little &
60

1
2
3 Eager 2010). According to Wilson (2012) play spaces that do not provide choice and
4 opportunities for creative play may result in children adding elements of risk into their play to
5 provide challenge. In order to provide choice while limiting risk, a risk benefit assessment
6 approach is recommended (Shackell et al, 2008) which meets legal obligations ‘while
7 promoting a balanced approach that considers industry standards and other guidance in the
8 light of local circumstances, and of children’s need for more exciting and challenging play’
9 (Shackell et al., 2008:44). In order to learn to assess risk, children need opportunities to
10 encounter it in their play, in addition, risky play supports children’s emotional wellbeing,
11 resilience and mental health (Tovey, 2007). Little and Eager (2010) identify children’s
12 preference for challenge and excitement in outdoor play but suggest that the equipment
13 provided in play spaces often limits the possibilities for risk. The findings from these authors
14 appear to have important implications for playground design and management, in addition to
15 the views of the users of these spaces.
16
17
18
19
20

21 ***2.4 Designing spaces with and for children***

22
23 While there is increasing international interest in including children in the design and
24 construction of play spaces for their use, how best to ensure children’s participation and voice
25 differs. Loebach’s (2011) study in Peru *with* (our italics) children included them in the whole
26 process including the planning, design, choice of materials, testing, construction and
27 implementation of the play space. She highlights the benefits of children’s participation in
28 creating play spaces, but recognises the difficulties inherent, most importantly, in the choice
29 of effective methods for children to fully participate. Firinci Orman’s (2013) approach in
30 Bulgaria similarly provided children with opportunities to design their play spaces using art-
31 based activities. Research on designing spaces *for* (our italics) children can take a different
32 approach, employing methods such as observation and consultation with parents to identify
33 children’s interests and uses of existing play space to inform design (Refshauge et al., 2015).
34 This approach identified how children used existing spaces and the affordances that
35 equipment and space provided, but did not include the child’s voice, instead relying on
36 observations from parents. Our approach focussed on eliciting the views of the children
37 through drawings and talk, but they were not involved in the construction or implementation
38 of the design itself.
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51

52 ***2.5 Children as Research Participants***

53
54 In supporting our student researchers in the development of their ideas about which methods
55 to use, we explored with them the challenges related to undertaking research with young
56 children. Green (2017) and Horgan (2017) note a growth in child participatory research over
57 the last two decades and how children are now recognised as ‘actors in their own right who
58 have diverse and often divergent opinions and views about their everyday life worlds’
59
60

1
2
3 (Green, 2017:154). Punch (2002) provided useful insight into these challenges by
4 questioning which methods suit children given their marginalised position in adult society.
5 noting the importance of critically reflecting upon the advantages and disadvantages of
6 'child-centred' (Punch,2002:323) methods to avoid assumptions about what methods are
7 more appropriate for children's perceived competences or lack of them. This includes
8 acknowledging children's position in society and how childhood is constrained and perceived
9 by adults. Therefore, consideration of the age, competence, experience, and social status of
10 children as participants and their cultural environments and physical settings necessitate
11 consideration. The methods utilised to elicit responses from children, therefore, need to be
12 carefully considered, recognising that children are unused to being asked to provide their
13 views. She notes, 'The challenge is how best to enable children to express their views to an
14 adult researcher...' (Punch, 2002:325).

15
16
17
18
19
20 Listening to the child involves more than just verbal expressions and Clark & Moss (2001),
21 and Spyrou (2011), suggest that the use of multi method approaches encapsulate the many
22 ways in which children communicate their idea. The Mosaic Approach (Clark and Moss,
23 2001) makes use of observation, child conferencing, and visual images including children's
24 photographs, drawings and maps to create a 'mosaic' of the child. Punch (2002) notes that
25 group task- based methods enable children to feel comfortable with adult researchers who are
26 not known to them, while drawing is a particularly useful tool to use with younger children
27 because it is familiar to them and enables children to express their ideas, noting, 'drawings
28 themselves are rich visual illustrations which directly show how children see their world'
29 (Punch, 2002:331).

30
31
32
33
34 The challenge, however, is to take care not to misinterpret children's drawings and impose
35 adult interpretations upon them. Wright (2010) discusses the adult role as 'interlocutor' and
36 suggests this requires a fine balance of reciprocity, with the child leading the dialogue about
37 their drawing. Hence, a high level of sensitivity is needed using open ended questions and
38 'tuning in' to children's drawings with them. However, visual methods alone may not be
39 sufficient to elicit the authentic views of children due to the selective process they entail.
40 Spyrou (2011:154) notes that 'images are selections produced out of a number of possibilities
41 and, like all other texts, cannot be authentic depictions of social reality.' He suggests instead,
42 that we must pay attention to children's silences as these may hold much information.
43 Colliver (2017:862) also considers how research methodologies used with children often take
44 an 'adultist' approach, where decisions about how children can meaningfully contribute are
45 taken by adults who often underestimate children's capabilities. She further identifies ethical
46 difficulties in relation to researching children's authentic perspectives and points to the
47 importance of listening to children to fully understand their views (Colliver, 2017: 855).

48
49
50
51
52
53 Horgan (2017) while acknowledging the challenges involved in working with children as
54 research participants, argues strongly that this should not stop us involving children in
55 research, noting '...child participatory research has much potential which has not yet been
56 mined...' (Horgan, 2017:256). She further asserts, we cannot eradicate power differences
57 between adults and children, but we can acknowledge and aim to minimise them to build
58 capacity in children to participate in the research process. Gillett-Swan & Sargeant (2018)

1
2
3 note that school spaces and the researchers themselves, can influence children's participation,
4 agency and voice, consequently they highlight the importance of researcher reflexivity within
5 this process.
6
7

8 **3.0 Method**

9 **Participants**

10
11
12 The children and the two parks are situated in an ex coal mining village in the north midlands
13 of England, with a population of around 7,500 people. It is a community with relatively high
14 levels of deprivation and lower levels of qualifications compared to the county within which
15 it is situated. A recent need assessment undertaken by the local county council (McCormick,
16 et al., 2017:57) shows that 23.1% of children in this community live in low income families,
17 compared with 17.1% of children across the county and 19.9% of children across England.
18
19

20
21 The primary research was undertaken by 12 undergraduate student researchers with two Year
22 2 classes in the only two schools within the village; a Nursery and Infant School for children
23 aged 3 to 7 years, and a Primary School for children aged 3 to 11 years. Year 2 children were
24 selected to undertake the research after taking guidance from the participating schools. Year 2
25 is the second part of Key Stage 1 of the UK National Curriculum (Gov.UK, 2017) and
26 children are aged 6 & 7 years. All Year 2 children present on the day in both schools took
27 part in the research activities (60 children). The authors (2 lecturers) accompanied the
28 students to each school, to facilitate and take photographs (with informed consent). The
29 children's teachers were present within the classroom but did not participate.
30
31

32
33
34 Prior to the commencement of the research, the students attended an initial project meeting in
35 September 2015, chaired by a representative of the district council, this included
36 representatives from a number of community groups including: a community forest park
37 trust, an Executive Head Teacher and two Head Teachers of the local schools, district
38 councillors, representatives from the local Sure Start children's centre and local community
39 and youth action groups and charities working for children and young people. This provided
40 context for the project alongside multiple voices from the local community and was a useful
41 learning opportunity for the student researchers.
42
43

44 **3.1 Data Collection**

45
46
47 The students visited the two local parks in late September 2015 taking photographs and notes,
48 after which they produced their own written evaluations of the creative play opportunities
49 within these spaces for their assessment for the module, informed by literature. Park A
50 included a play area which was in need of updating as well as a skateboard park, which
51 attracted mainly older children; Park B was on the edge of the village on reclaimed colliery
52 land, which is part of a community forest and includes a visitors' centre and a fenced off play
53 area. Both parks were on the Council's Locality Plan and due for upgrade. Following
54 completion of the site evaluations, the students visited the schools to undertake their primary
55 research, this element of the research was voluntary and unassessed.
56
57
58
59

60 **Fig1. Play area Park A**

Fig 2. Swing set Park B

Fig 3. Roundabout Park B

3.2 Methods used by student researchers to elicit children's views

The students were familiar with a range of possible research methods from a core research module in the second year of their degree, therefore ownership for methodological design was handed over to students to support their learning as emerging researchers. The Mosaic Approach by Clark and Moss (2001) and the ideas of Loebach (2011) were influential in our students' approach to the research (both were recommended reading for the module) and visual and verbal approaches were the key methods chosen. The students were split into 4 groups (working in groups of 3) and methods/activities chosen by the groups are outlined below. Each set of activities were planned to fit a single school teaching session of one hour and took place in the school classrooms.

Table 1: Methods used by student researchers

Group 1(School A)	Group 2(School A)	Group 3 (School B)	Group 4 (School B)
Materials/textures for children to feel and choose favourite (wood, stone, metal, plastic)	Discussion of different types of parks.	Individual drawing activity of ideal outdoor play environment.	Drawing of individual resources for an ideal park.
Drawing own play area (individual drawing)	Individual drawing of ideal park	Voting activity- children choose favourite resource from images presented (Fig 4)	Collage using all the drawings to make a 'group' park
Favourite part of play area/ requirements for play area (discussion)			

Fig 4 here. Voting Activity

3.3 Procedure

The students were split into four groups, group 1 and 2 went to school A and groups 3 and 4 went to school B. The children were split by the teacher into groups for each activity, with

1
2
3 the student researchers using their own resources (images, examples of materials – wood,
4 metal, stone, plastic) and drawing equipment from the schools. The project was introduced to
5 the children by the lecturers (authors), the children were told about the plans to update the
6 two local parks and the need to find out their views. Then each activity was explained to each
7 group of children by the student group to which they were allocated. The students timed their
8 activities to fill one teaching session (one hour) and completed the activities with their
9 individual groups in different parts of the classroom. The students' use of data collection
10 methods was not fully conceptualised in all cases, and as such data was not always recorded
11 accurately (for example, two groups chose discussion as part of their methodology but verbal
12 responses were selectively recorded and limited.) The students were encouraged to reflect
13 upon their results and to produce a dissemination poster, but as this was voluntary and not an
14 assessed part of their module, the results were hastily produced and limited in some cases.
15
16
17
18
19
20
21

22 *3.4 Data Analysis*

23 Working in their groups, the students collated the children's responses and drawings, noting
24 frequency of responses to produce a poster indicating children's choices and preferences. The
25 posters were unassessed and were passed to the district council for display in the park
26 community centre to disseminate results of the research to the children and the community.
27 We the authors of this paper, collated both the students' dissemination posters and the
28 students' assessed written evaluations (with their permission) to produce a report of
29 children's views for the local district council.
30
31
32
33
34
35

36 **4 Ethical considerations**

37 All three phases of the project went through our University's ethical approval processes and
38 adhered to the Data Protection Act (1998) which was required at the time. This included
39 seeking informed consent from the schools, parents, children, young people and all the adults
40 involved in the research as either researcher, stakeholders or participants. Permission was
41 also sought for the use of photographs from the research findings through social and local
42 media and through publication. Children were asked to provide verbal consent for the use of
43 their drawings, and verbal responses. Consent was also sought from children to being
44 photographed during the activities (faces were not used). Mayall points out, 'a central
45 characteristic of adults is that they have power over children' (in Christensen and James, 2017:110)
46 and therefore, the balance of power between adult researchers and children needs special attention.
47 (Horgan, 2017). Students discussed this with their lecturers before planning their activities and
48 attempts were made to counteract their position, for example, by considering the use of open
49 ended questions and encouraging the children to talk amongst themselves.
50
51
52
53
54
55
56

57 **5. Findings and discussion**

58 *5.1 Children's views related to fixed provision and resources*

59
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Whilst the project foregrounded children's ideas through consultation with them, it remains a challenge to identify with certainty that all the ideas expressed were their own. The influence of a 'nature project' which was part of the curriculum at the time on the children's responses and the presence of the teacher within the classroom, cannot fully be known. Although the teacher did not engage in the activities, this presence and the school environment itself may have influenced the children's results (Gillett-Swan & Sargeant, 2018).

Fig 5 here - Children engaged in drawing activities

Findings clearly identified that traditional playground equipment such as climbing frames, slides and swings were important to children as well as 'risky' play features such as 'monkey bars', 'zip wires' and 'climbing walls' (Figures five and six). Little and Eager (2010) and Wilson (2012) identify children's preference for risk and challenge within outdoor play but recognise that the equipment provided within these spaces does not always afford these opportunities. The children concurred with these ideas and their interest in risky play features was evident within their drawings of zip wires, climbing walls and the inclusion of water in various ways, one child even included a fire underneath his zip-wire drawing. At the same time, the popularity of traditional play equipment was apparent within the children's drawings and expressions, possibly indicating their expectations of park provision or their own experiences of them (Figures five and six).

Fig 6 here- Children engaged in drawing activities

Children also requested that play equipment be provided for all ages on the same site, so they could play alongside older and younger siblings. One response was '*the big kids can play on the monkey bars and the babies can play in the flower part*' while another stated, '*I would like my little sister to play with me*'. This was also recognised as being important for adults supervising children of different ages. This is interesting, as park equipment for different age groups is often situated separately, usually for health and safety reasons. Wilson (2012) argues for equipment to be both inclusive and age-appropriate. Age or height limits indicated on signs in public parks, assume a developmental view of children which limits their capabilities to specific ages and stages. As Tovey (2007) identifies, risk is variable and depends on the capabilities of the individual. In the research, children expressed a preference for equipment made of wood or stone over metal and plastic, which could be considered in any new provision. They also expressed a preference for 'rainbow' themed play provision. Swings and climbing frames were the most popular pieces of fixed equipment mentioned so these need to be provided as key features and in plentiful numbers.

5.2 Flexible provision & loose materials

1
2
3 The responses demonstrated a very strong interest in transitory, semi-permanent provision
4 such as mark making, display of art work, dressing up opportunities and gardening. One child
5 stated, 'we should have somewhere to play dress up', while another group identified areas to
6 draw and display art work as being important to the children. Wright (2010:6) notes that mark
7 making 'allows children to say and write what they think and feel usually without adult
8 intrusion' while Anning (1999, cited in Wright, 2010:7) considers drawing and mark making
9 as the 'visual equivalent of dramatic play'. It is perhaps the agency that these types of activity
10 afford children that makes them so appealing in outdoor play space, where, arguably they
11 have more control and opportunities to make choices and decisions. Similarly, dressing up
12 and role play allow children to use their imagination and direct the trajectory of their play,
13 usually free from adult intervention and interference. Casey (2007) discusses the need for
14 flexibility in play spaces using short term, semi - permanent and fixed 'long term' provision.
15 Short-term features are more difficult to provide in public play spaces, but they were highly
16 valued in the children's responses.
17
18
19
20
21
22

23 Most of the children's drawings featured flowers and many included places to grow things as
24 being important in their designs. Contemporary commentators (Louv, 2005; Gill, 2008;
25 Knight, 2011; Wilson, 2012) and historical pioneers such as Rousseau, Froebel, Macmillan,
26 and Isaacs, have identified the benefits of nature play for young children and recent concerns
27 about the lack of opportunities for children to engage with nature have resulted in the
28 introduction of 'Forest Schools' in the UK.(Knight, 2011) .The children's interest in
29 gardening activities and the presence of flowers and animals therefore could be an indication
30 of this lack of engagement with nature within their own lives and increased time indoors. The
31 preference for natural materials of wood and stone over plastic and metal was an interesting
32 result and could be a further indication of this, however, this may have been influenced by
33 other factors, such as the choice of samples or their own experiences of play spaces.
34
35
36
37
38

39 Specific reference was made to the inclusion of water, in the form of a paddling pool (in one
40 case under the zip wire) and a 'mud kitchen'. Nicolson (1971), Wilson (2012) and Zamani
41 (2016), highlight the value of loose materials in children's play spaces as they provide
42 flexibility and can be used according to children's own agendas unlike 'fixed provision'.
43 Glenn et al., (2012) similarly note children's interest in repurposing spaces to meet their own
44 play agendas. Natural living features in outdoor environments such as animals and plants can
45 provide flexibility but are often excluded from these environments or 'fenced out'. It is
46 interesting to note that children were aware of both the risks and benefits of keeping animals
47 out of play spaces. Also mentioned were a toy shop and a sweet shop, both of which reflect
48 children's specific concerns but may not fit with an adult health agenda often embedded in
49 outdoor play space design within the UK. Firinci Orman (2013) similarly, makes reference to
50 embedded ideology within playground design in Bulgaria.
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

5.3 Children's views on health & safety

One of the findings of the project was the children's awareness of health and safety and the frequent references to this within the responses. Many of the children's drawings included fences around the play areas and the importance of safety and signs was clear in their designs. It is impossible to know if this reflects the children's own concerns or if this reflects adult anxieties about the risks associated with outdoor play that have been internalised by children (Blundell, 2016:103) but they clearly indicated their knowledge and awareness of a health and safety agenda including the need to keep animals out of play spaces. This could suggest that the health and safety agenda expressed may be an indication of the embedded adult ideology identified by Firinci Orman (2013) in playground design that the children have internalised. Conversely, the children's interest in animals and wildlife was also clear, with one response stating, '*animals live outdoors; they should be in the park too*'. Olsen et al (2010) identify that including children in the planning process of outdoor environments for children is fundamental and can result in lower maintenance costs, increase imagination and creativity and can also reduce injury.

6. Limitations

While this project foregrounded children's ideas through consultation with them it remains a challenge to identify with certainty that all the ideas expressed were their own. The influence of the 'nature project' and the presence of the teacher within the classroom cannot fully be known. Similarly, critical reflection on the methodology used, the interpretation of the data and the power imbalance between the student researchers and the children may also have influenced children's responses. Colliver (2017) reminds us that it is vital for researchers to challenge assumptions about key concepts, measures and scales within research design to ensure they are not 'adultist'. She warns we need to move beyond 'listening' to children and into 'understanding' children. (Colliver, 2017:862) In this project, the methodologies utilised by the students were in some cases not fully conceptualised and much of the data collected was based on adult interpretations of the children's drawings.

Consulting children in the design process is recognised as being relevant in ensuring that their voices are heard (Horgan, 2017) but this is a complex process as the staff and students engaged in the project found out. Engaging children in participatory design and building projects requires thoughtful and time-consuming pre-planning to ensure successful outcomes (Loebach, 2011). This project attempted to position children as designers and decision-makers affording them the opportunity 'to have a voice and an active hand in the development of their community environment' (Loebach, 2011:1). In respect of this, children were asked to share their ideas through a range of activities, however the scope of those activities were limited and many of the choices had already been made for them by the

1
2
3 student researchers through the design of their ‘adultist’ (Colliver, 2017:862) research
4 instruments. Loebach (2011) suggests that control over activities and decision- making is
5 often curtailed (unknowingly) by adults, who underestimate children’s capacity for authentic
6 and meaningful decisions. Similarly, Alanen (2016:159) notes that ‘children’s lives are
7 intersectionally structured’ so we cannot be sure how other factors may have influenced their
8 responses. The students in this project were constrained by inexperience in relation to
9 research methodologies and time limits imposed upon them by the higher education
10 institution. Consequently, there may have been better ways to elicit more ‘authentic’ voices
11 of the children than the methodologies chosen.
12
13
14
15

16 The research aimed to position students as researchers and partners within the process and to
17 hand over control and decision making to them as far as was possible. As a result of this
18 approach, responsibility for the design and implementation of the research methodology was
19 handed over to the students and the authors purposefully positioned themselves as facilitators.
20 These were purposefully chosen opportunities for deep and authentic learning, and this
21 indeed did happen. (Explored further in another paper by Yates and Oates under submission).
22 However, there are constraints to this approach, the students were inexperienced researchers
23 resulting in limited depth, complexity and recording of the data. Improvements could have
24 been made to the methods used to capture children’s voices, children’s drawings were used as
25 a key approach by each group, which according to Spyrou (2016) may not have been
26 sufficient. He suggests that we need to pay more attention to ‘the silent, the unclear and
27 incoherent, the perplexing and the contradictory’ (Spyrou, 2016:14) which was not
28 emphasised enough within the research methodologies. Wright (2010) identifies the fine
29 balance needed when undertaking the role of ‘interlocutor’ with the child leading the
30 dialogue in child conferencing, this is a difficult role and one that requires experience. This
31 approach could have been further explored by the staff and students within the project.
32 Positioning students as researchers, necessitated their control of the primary research
33 methods, despite this, there are lessons to be learned in relation to the preparation of the
34 student researchers and critical reflection on the content of their research module will be
35 taken forward by the authors.
36
37
38
39
40
41
42

43 **Fig 7 Here. New Play provision (park B)**

44 **Fig 8. Here. New Play provision (park B)**

45 **Fig 9. Here. New Play provision (park B)**

46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 **7. Conclusion**

57
58 The children’s enthusiasm and desire to share their ideas and views was clear to the
59 researchers throughout and they appeared to enjoy the process. They expressed their
60

1
2
3 preference for traditional play equipment, alongside risky adventurous play and engagement
4 with animals and nature through their drawings and verbal responses. Semi-permanent and
5 transitory features were also valued, perhaps as a way of retaining ownership of their play
6 activities. It is acknowledged that involving children needs careful planning and researchers
7 need to be mindful of how children's authentic voices can be heard and how they are
8 positioned within the research.
9

10
11 The student researchers were surprised by the children's knowledge and abilities to express
12 insightful and valuable ideas. This reinforced the value of outdoor play spaces in children and
13 young people's lives and in supporting their well-being; it also reinforced the need for
14 children to be consulted and involved in the decision making and design of spaces intended
15 for their use.
16
17

18
19 In January 2018 we were informed that the local council had responded to the findings and
20 had designed a new layout for one of the parks (Park B – see Figure 6). The new fixed
21 provision, of a timber construction, was installed in the Spring of 2018 within the woodland
22 area, consisting of more adventurous play equipment. The park is now very well used by
23 local children in all weathers as observed by the authors. This validates the project and we
24 hope that the children's involvement in the design will, as Olsen et al., (2010) suggests,
25 encourage ownership and pride in their local environment and will contribute to the
26 maintenance of these spaces on a long-term basis.
27
28
29
30
31

32 Word count excluding refs and title page **5767**
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55

56 **References**

57
58 Andrews, M. (2012) *Exploring Play for Early Childhood Studies*. London: Sage
59
60

1
2
3 Alanen, L. (2016) 'Intersectionality' and other challenges to theorizing childhood. *Childhood*
4 23(2): 157–161 <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0907568216631055>
5
6

7
8 Bellinger, A. Bullen, D, Ford, D (2014) Practice research in practice learning: students as co-
9 researchers and co-constructors of knowledge, *Nordic Social Work Research*, 4(sup1): 58-69,
10 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/2156857X.2014.961526>
11

12 Blundell, D (2016) *Rethinking Children's Space and Places*. London: Bloomsbury
13

14
15 Carroll, P. Witten, K. and Stewart, C. (2017) Children are Citizens Too: Consulting with
16 Children on the Redevelopment of a Central City Square in Auckland, Aotearoa/New
17 Zealand *Built Environment*, 43(2):272-289 doi:10.2148/benv.43.2.272.
18
19

20
21 Casey, T. (2007) *Environments for Outdoor Play –a Practical Guide to making Space for*
22 *Children*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing
23

24
25 Christensen, P and James, A (eds) (2017) *Research With Children: Perspectives and*
26 *Practices*, London: Routledge
27

28
29 Clark, A. and Moss, P. (2001) *Listening to Young Children: The Mosaic Approach*. London:
30 National Children's Bureau
31

32
33 Colliver, Y. (2017) From listening to understanding: interpreting young children's
34 perspectives. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 25(6): 854-865,
35 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2017.1380882>
36
37

38
39 Firinci Orman, T. (2013) My Dream Playground Workshop: Involving Children in
40 Participatory Design. April 2013 Conference: ARCHHIST'13 Conference- Politics in the
41 History of Architecture as Cause & Consequence. Istanbul, Turkey
42
43

44
45 Gill, T. (2008) *No Fear: Growing up in a risk averse society* London: Calouste Gulbenkian
46 Foundation
47

48
49 Glenn, N.M., Knight, C. J., Holt,,N.L., & Spence, J.C. (2012) Meanings of play among
50 children *Childhood* 20(2):185 –199 DOI: 10.1177/0907568212454751
51

52
53 Gov.UK (2017) *The National Curriculum [online]*
54 [https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4/the-national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4)
55 [key-stages-1-to-4/the-national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4/the-national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4)
56 (Accessed 29 September, 2017)
57

58
59 Green, M. (2017) 'If there's no sustainability our future will get wrecked': Exploring
60 children's perspectives of sustainability. 24(2): 151-167
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0907568216649672>

1
2
3 Hodgman, L. (2011) *Enabling Environments in the Early Years* London: Practical Pre-School

4
5 Horgan, D. (2017) Child participatory research methods: Attempts to go ‘deeper’. *Childhood*
6 24(2) 2017:245-259 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0907568216647787>

7
8
9 Horgan, D., O’Riordan, J., Martin, S., & O’Sullivan, J. (2018) Children’s views on school –
10 age care: Child’s play or childcare? *Children and Youth Services Review* 91:338-346
11 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2018.05.035>

12
13 James, A. & Prout, A. (eds) (1997) *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood:
14 Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*. 2nd ed. London: Falmer

15
16
17 Gillett-Swann, J. K. & Sargeant, J. (2018) Unintentional power plays: interpersonal
18 contextual impacts in child-centred participatory research, *Educational Research* 60(1):1-16
19 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2017.1410068>

20
21
22 Jensen, K. and Bennett, L. (2016) Enhancing teaching and learning through dialogue: a
23 student and staff partnership model. *International Journal for Academic Development* 21(1):
24 41-53. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2015.1113537>

25
26
27 Knight, S. (2011) *Risk and Adventure in Early Years Outdoor Play*. London; Sage Publishing

28
29
30 Little, H. & Eager, D. (2010) Risk, challenge and safety: implications for
31 play quality and playground design, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*,
32 18(4):497-513 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2010.525949>

33
34
35 Loebach, J. (2011) The Magical Park of Aviacion: Lessons from a participatory design
36 project with the children of Aviacion, Peru. *Play Rights September 2011*

37
38
39 Louv, R. (2005) *Last Child in the Woods*. London: Atlantic Books

40
41
42 Mayall, B. (2002) *Towards a Sociology of Childhood: Thinking from Children’s Lives*.
43 Buckingham: Open University Press

44
45 McCormick, K., Aderson, S., Kightley, L., Hall, J., Bates, I., Sinclair, J. & Crouch, N. (2017)
46 *Joint Strategic Needs Assessment: The People of Nottinghamshire* (2017) Nottingham:
47 Nottinghamshire County Council. Full Report ID /d/190085
48 <http://www.nottinghamshireinsight.org.uk/research-areas/jsna/summaries-and-overviews/the-people-of-nottinghamshire-2017/> (Accessed 12 November, 2018)

49
50
51
52 Nicholson, S. (1971). *How not to cheat children: The theory of loose parts*. *Landscape
53 Architecture* 62 (1): 30-35.

54
55
56 Nicholson, J. Kurnik, J. Jevgiovikj, M. and Ufoegbune, V. (2015) Deconstructing adults’ and
57 children’s discourse on children’s play: listening to children’s voices to destabilise deficit
58 narratives. *Early Child Development and Care* 185(10):1569–1586
59 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03004430.2015.1011149>

1
2
3
4 Olsen, H., Thompson, J., Hudson, S. & Kreiss, S. (2010) Creating Outdoor Early Childhood
5 Environments: Design Strategies and Resources. *Design Principles and Practices: An*
6 *International Journal*. 4(4): 345-360
7

8
9 Punch, S. (2002) Research with Children: The same or different from research with adults?
10 *Childhood* 9 (3):321-341
11

12 Qvortrup, J. (1991) *Childhood as a Social Phenomenon- An Introduction to a Series of*
13 *National Reports*. Eurosocial Report 36/1999. Vienna: European Centre
14

15
16
17 Refshauge, A.D., Stigsdotter, U. K., Lamm, B. & Thorleifsdottir, K. (2015) Evidence-Based
18 Playground Design: Lessons Learned from Theory to Practice, *Landscape Research* 40(2):
19 226-246, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01426397.2013.824073>
20

21
22
23 Shackell, A., Butler, N., Doyle, P. & Ball, D. (2008) *Design for Play: A guide to creating*
24 *successful play spaces*. Nottingham: DCSF Publications for Play England
25

26
27 Spyrou, S. (2011) The limits of children's voices: From authenticity to critical, reflexive
28 representation. *Childhood* 18(2): 151–165 <https://dx.doi/pdf/10.1177/0907568210387834>
29

30
31
32 Spyrou, S. (2016) Researching children's silences: Exploring the fullness of voice in .
33 childhood research *Childhood* 23(1): 7 –21 <https://dx.doi/pdf/10.1177/0907568215571618>
34

35
36 Tovey, H. (2007) *Playing Outdoors Spaces and Places, Risk and Challenge*. Maidenhead:
37 Open University Press
38

39
40 UN General Assembly (1989) *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*.
41 New York.
42

43 UNICEF UK (2017) United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child available from
44 <https://downloads.unicef.org.uk/wp> (accessed 18/12/17)
45

46
47 Wilson, R. (2012) *Nature and Young Children: Encouraging Creative Play and Learning in*
48 *Natural Environments* Abingdon: Routledge
49

50
51 Wright, S. (2010) *Understanding creativity in early childhood: meaning-making and*
52 *children's drawings*. London: Sage
53

54
55 Zamani, Z. (2016) 'The woods is a more free space for children to be creative; their
56 imagination kind of sparks out there': exploring young children's cognitive play
57 opportunities in natural, manufactured and mixed outdoor preschool zones, *Journal of*
58 *Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 16(2): 172-189,
59 <https://doi.org/10.1080/14729679.2015.1122538>
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

For Peer Review

Figures



Fig1. Play area in Park A



Fig 2 Swing set Park B



Fig 3 Roundabout Park B

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60



Fig 4. Voting activity



Fig 5. Children engaged in drawing activities

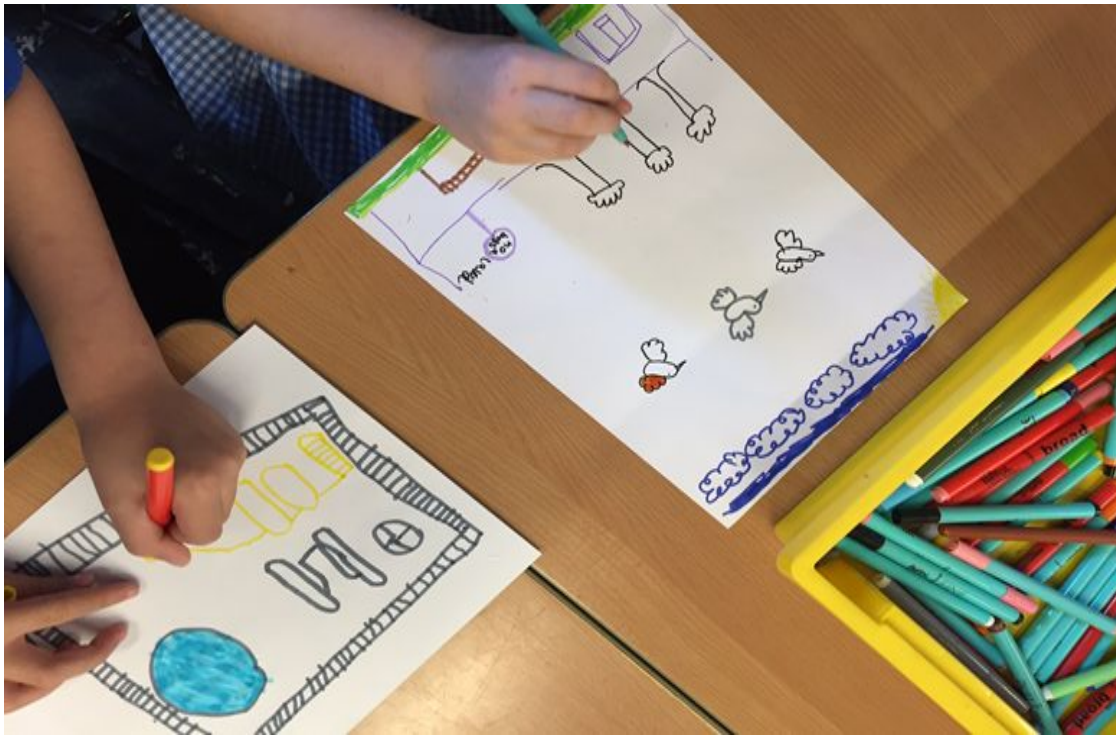


Fig 6. Children engaged in drawing activities



Fig 7 New play provision (Park B)

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60



Fig 8 New play provision (Park B)



Fig 9 New play provision (Park B)