OUTDOOR PLAYSPACES AS SITES OF SOCIAL INCLUSION: THE CHALLENGES OF PLAY PROVISION IN IRELAND

Dr. Helen Lynch and Alice Moore
Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, University College Cork, Ireland

Content of presentation

• Background to Irish context and outdoor playspace research: sample projects
• Introduction to 4 exploratory projects
• Current gaps and plans for future
Background

When all else is equal, children prefer to play outside, with nearby friends (Kilkelley et al., 2015)

• HOWEVER: Changing nature of childhood:
  • Shrinking horizons of childhood (Gill, 2005)
  • Play deprivation (Bundy et al., 2011)
  • Nature deficit disorder (Louv, 2005)
  • Erosion of everyday social participation (Hart, 2016)

Outdoor designing for play: Issue of social inclusion

The Nature of the Irish Outdoors
Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: searching for outdoor play 2014-2020

• DATA SOURCES: GUI/HBSC

- 62% of 7-year-olds were involved in structured cultural activities, such as dance, ballet, arts and drama. More than twice the number of girls (34%) than boys (17%) took part in these activities. Participation was also significantly related to maternal education and family income (33%).
- 19% of 9-year-olds reported playing sport at least once a week. Boys were significantly more likely to play sport every day (34%) compared to girls (12%) (2001).
- Participation in structured sports or organised activities was related to social advantage of both 9 and 11 years of age (2012).

• GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS:

1.6 Continue to support accessible and affordable youth and sport activities, which encourage young people’s overall personal and social development including healthy behaviours and engage young people who might be at risk of early school-leaving or engaging in criminal activity and anti-social behaviour. (DCYA, DTÉ, DH, HSE, Tusla, AGS)

1.15 Continue to develop play and recreation spaces for both children and young people, from playgrounds (for multiple age ranges) to youth clubs, sports and leisure centres, and where possible look to weatherproof these spaces. (DCYA, DCESL, DC)
Children’s Participation: Putting ‘VOICE’ in Context

- **Children will have a voice** in matters which effect them (UNCRC, 1989; Children’s Strategy, 2000)
- This includes being heard in relation to **places for play** (UNCRC, 1989; General Comment, 2013)

---

**Children Communicate in MULTIPLE ways**

**VOICE ≠ VOICE!**

---

**Typology of Designed and Planned Places for Children: guiding our starting point.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INSTITUTIONAL PLACES</th>
<th>PRIVATE PLACES</th>
<th>WILDERNESS</th>
<th>WILDERNESS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day-care</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Urban wilderness</td>
<td>Natural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>Cars</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schoolyards</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports parks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme parks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUBLIC PLACES</td>
<td>FOUND PLACES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Streets</td>
<td>Vacant lots</td>
<td>Community gardens</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidewalks</td>
<td>Natural areas</td>
<td>School gardens</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks</td>
<td>Waterfronts</td>
<td>City farms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trails</td>
<td>Street corners</td>
<td>Greenways</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malls</td>
<td></td>
<td>Skate parks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterfronts</td>
<td></td>
<td>Town trails</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaches</td>
<td></td>
<td>Front porches</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Found/OFF LIMITS PLACE</td>
<td>Discovery/adventure places</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vacant lots</td>
<td>Cyberspace</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Francis & Lorenzo, 2002, p. 158)
Overview of Play and Playspaces Research

Key Findings

▪ The physical, social, political environment present barriers to participation in playground settings, particularly for children with disabilities.
▪ Children’s voice is absent from the majority of research on playspaces.

need for data on children's lives: that includes the child's voice in researching play needs/preferences

Just because a person can't speak doesn't mean they have nothing to say
Overview of Play and Playspaces Research

Play and Playspaces Research
(Dept. of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, University College Cork, Ireland)

Playgrounds
(Built Environment)

Scoping Review - Accessibility and Usability
Moore & Lynch (2015)

School Yard - Inclusive Design
Cagney, Carroll & Lynch (2015)

Play in Nature
(Natural environment)

Heritage Council Project

Inclusive Play
(Inclusive environments)

Fitzgerald’s Park - Usability Enright, Keating & Lynch (2015)

COST Ludi European Project

Traditional Irish School yard..
http://www.silvabuild.ie/index.php/component/content/article?layout=edit&id=19

Where the children currently play at break-time in the Cork city school
From December 2014 – June 2015

- **125 CHILDREN in total**
- **18 children in 3 focus groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Why?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drawings of their ideal play space/favourite thing in the play space. (Each pupil in the school took part in this activity).</td>
<td>Visual data and medium for children to think and describe their thinking. Promoted thought and discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actions &amp; Feelings Chart (as part of focus groups)</td>
<td>Allowed researchers to gain better understanding of the affordances provided by the different pieces of equipment, nature and space and what the children liked about these. It gave the school more direction to look at the play, behaviour and feelings afforded by other possibly cheaper options.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designing your Play space Poster (as part of focus groups)</td>
<td>Gave the researchers understanding of the children’s understanding of focus and if it was important to them. Also assisted children to choose between similar affordances e.g. twisty and straight slide. Demonstrated children’s value of different affordances i.e. nature, sitting areas, open spaces and physical equipment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photographs (as part of focus groups)</td>
<td>Photographic data of the children’s posters for the designing your play space activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>Provided researchers with insight into the children’s play habits in their schoolyard. Discussed their play in their current yard during the focus groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field notes</td>
<td>Recorded initial thoughts, notes and insights of observations and focus group sessions. Also after meetings and discussions with teachers, principal and landscape.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**THE CONSULTATION MODEL**

1. **Phase 1: WHOLE SCHOOL**
   - Drawings and Observations

2. **Phase 2: Focus group A - 18 CHILDREN**
   - Discussion of Drawings
   - ‘Design your play space’ activity

3. **Phase 3: Focus Group B**
   - actions and feelings chart (child-led analysis)
   - Themes emerged in second focus group

4. **Phase 4: REPORT PRODUCED TO INFORM DESIGN**
# FROM DESIRE TO DESIGN- WHAT THE CHILDREN WOULD LIKE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Learning/developmental benefits</th>
<th>About this Equipment:</th>
<th>Affordances that provide this:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Climbing</td>
<td>Climbing is challenging and exciting for children. It presents a physical challenge encouraging physical development in strength and coordination. The children emphasized that climbing equipment such as climbing frames has a competitive element which is also important as it is fun and promotes positive self-esteem when they have succeeded.</td>
<td>This climbing frame would suit all ages of children would hold challenge for every child as it is numerous different levels.</td>
<td>Monkey bars, climbing frames, pyramid climbing frames, climbing wall, ladders, tree stumps</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Place to chat, pretend play, use as a base | Throughout every age group the idea of a house on stilts or on the ground was very popular. This was in the top 5 most popular items for the play space. The younger and middle age groups wanted to use the house for pretend play e.g. ‘Mums and Dads’. | Tree House (on stilts) Wendy House Shelter | Some of these playtree houses come with an area underneath suitable for play. For example, having a sand pit underneath where it could be sheltered from the weather. A picnic table and seating could also be fitted in the level underneath. The middle group also thought it would be good to use it as a base when playing team games such as ‘Capture the Flag’. The picture below shows tepee style frames with area to sit in on top which could be used for bases. | The ground level of this playhouse has been fitted with a sand pit (sand has not yet been filled in the photo). This house also has a drawbridge style entrance as well as a ladder. Shrewsbury Wood Products |

03/10/2017
School Yard – Inclusive Design

FROM DESIRE TO DESIGN

Place for climbing, jumping,

Outcomes:
- Increase in resilience
- Increase in social inclusion
- Sense of ownership

Place for socialising, talking
NEED FOR GUIDELINES ON CHILD PARTICIPATION IN DESIGNING FOR PLAY (not just consultation)

Overview of Play and Playspaces Research

- **Play and Playspaces Research**
  (Dept. of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, University College Cork, Ireland)

  - **Playgrounds**
    (Built Environment)
    - Scoping Review - Accessibility and Usability
      Moore & Lynch (2015)
    - School Yard - Inclusive Design
      Cagney, Carroll & Lynch (2015)

  - **Play in Nature**
    (Natural environment)
    - Heritage Council Project

  - **Inclusive Play**
    (Inclusive environments)
    - COST Ludi European Project
National Heritage Council Project 2015-2016

The Heritage Council of Ireland commissioned research report to conduct a review of contact with the outdoors and natural heritage among children aged 5-12.

http://www.heritagecouncil.ie/content/files/children_%20outdoors_commissioned_report_26mb.pdf

Irish Heritage Council

Purpose: to explore children’s experiences of nature and natural heritage
  • University College Cork: Law and Occupational Science

Project:
  • review evidence, law, policy
  • Children - 3 schools - city, town and country
    • 123 children contributed pictures
    • 39 children took part in focus groups
Review of evidence of benefit of children’s engagement with nature

Gill (2014):
• Rapid evidence assessment—due to disparate nature of evidence
• Acknowledging challenge of gathering robust evidence
• The environment under study included:
  • Woodlands
  • Urban green public spaces
  • Outdoor green domestic spaces
  • School grounds, including school gardens
  • “Wild areas” that may be found in or near urban areas
• 61 studies met the criteria for inclusion

General benefits identified: majority in area of health....

Table 3. Typology of benefits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General benefit</th>
<th>Specific benefit</th>
<th>Number of relevant studies*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health (physical, emotional and</td>
<td>Physical activity</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mental)</td>
<td>Mental and emotional health</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Healthy eating</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Motor development</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-being</td>
<td>Quality of outdoor play</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Psychosocial healthb</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Scientific learning</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Environmental knowledge</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language and communication</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Social skills</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional/behavioral</td>
<td>Self-control</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-confidence</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-awareness</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical/attitudinal</td>
<td>Concern for the environment</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Connectedness to nature</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sense of place</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The significance of playfulness as an engagement style is perhaps this review’s most important contribution to the literature*

Gill, 2014, p. 19
Children prefer to be outside

- Children report preferences for being outdoors rather than indoors.
- Location, weather and having friends nearby are strongly linked to the attractiveness of being outdoors.

*I prefer outside because with your friends you’ve got like, so many options to do outside. And like, even you can just talk outside and it’s being nice, and you get some sun, except for when it’s raining.*

(Girl, 10-12 years)

Children prefer to play outdoors, when they have:

1. **Safe places to play** (places that are welcome/comfortable);
2. Access to nearby **nature**; and
3. Close proximity to **friends**
Overview of Play and Playspaces Research

Play and Playspaces Research
(Dept. of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, University College Cork, Ireland)

Playgrounds
(Built Environment)
- Scoping Review - Accessibility and Usability
  Moore & Lynch (2015)

Play in Nature
(Natural environment)
- School Yard - Inclusive Design
  Cagney, Carroll & Lynch (2015)
- Heritage Council Project
  Kilkelly, Lynch, Moore, O’Connell & Field (2015)

Inclusive Play
(Inclusive environments)
- Fitzgerald’s Park - Usability
  Enright, Keating & Lynch (2015)
- COST Ludi European Project

Fitzgerald Park playground project 2015-2016

Press Release: Cork’s First Inclusive Playground
Press Release: 18th June, 2014

Cork City Council has today announced the development of Cork’s first inclusive playground that will enable children with disabilities to play alongside able children. The new playground will be located within the area of the existing play area in Fitzgerald’s Park in Cork and will open in June 2015. It is intended to become a national model of best practice for the provision of inclusive playgrounds in Ireland. A total of EUR200,000 will be invested in this new playground facility.

The public, outdoor playground will be an age-appropriate and safe environment that will encompass many rich structures to encourage play for all children, but especially those with developmental disabilities. It will also create a fun space for fostering friendships and understanding among children of all abilities.

Cork City Council is seeking landscape and architectural design and project management teams to tender for the contract to bring this concept to life. (See Tender Guide.)
Usability: What the children said...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8. Playground component and use.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Component</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound Wheel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Wheel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bench/Seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ladder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basket Swing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swings (3-12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swings (+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triple Bars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pyramid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climbing Wall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance Poles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slide (Wide)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slide (Enclosed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Springer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See-Saw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Running</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sand Play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wobbly Jetty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although this table does show component use, it does not show difficulty or challenge faced in using these components. It is evident from this table that the children’s physical limitations create a significant barrier to usability in the playground. The components used were in line with the traits associated with their condition, for example, the child with ASD displayed a preference to sensory and lone play. This table was constructed using only what the children described using in their interviews with the use of pictures.
Need for research on

- Play Preferences of Children with Different Abilities
- Usability
- Accessibility

Overview of Play and Playspaces Research

- Play and Playspaces Research (Dept. of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, University College Cork, Ireland)
  - Playgrounds (Built Environment)
    - Scoping Review - Accessibility and Usability
    - School Yard - Inclusive Design
      - Cagney, Carroll & Lynch (2015)
    - Fitzgerald's Park - Usability
  - Play in Nature (Natural environment)
    - Heritage Council Project
  - Inclusive Play (Inclusive environments)
    - COST Ludi European Project

37 countries across Europe

http://ludi-network.eu/

Brief summary of the research

1. Children prefer to play outdoors, when there are safe places to play, nearby nature and friends
2. However, children in general and children with disabilities are rarely included in research on usability and accessibility of outdoor playgrounds
3. There are no national guidelines on designing playspaces for inclusion in Ireland- and few guidelines in Europe
4. FEW POLICY GUIDELINES combine NATURE-ACCESSIBILITY-USABILITY- CHILD PARTICIPATION
NEED FOR **GUIDELINES ON UNIVERSAL DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION OF PLAYSPACES FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION FOR CHILDREN WITH ALL ABILITIES**

Current Research Priorities – Good Playspace Design

- **ACCESSIBILITY**
- **USABILITY**
- **CHILDREN’S VOICE**
- **GUIDELINES (UNIVERSAL DESIGN & CHILD PARTICIPATION)**
In Development......

OUTDOOR PLAY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION: PUBLIC PLAY SPACE AUDIT

Dr. Helen Lynch, Alice Moore, & Dr. Maria Prellwitz
Department of Occupational Science & Occupational Therapy, University College Cork, Ireland

© Dr. Helen Lynch, Alice Moore, & Dr. Maria Prellwitz
VERSION 3: 30TH MAY 2017

Research Grant
September 2017 – March 2018

National Research Grant commissioned by the National Disability Authority (NDA) and the Centre for Excellence and Universal Design (CEUD), IRELAND

Progressing Lifetime Communities through Universal Design
How do we ensure outdoor play is not hijacked by adult perspectives on health, exercise, sports, & learning?

A special thank you to the children and staff of schools in the southern region of Ireland, without whom these research projects would not have been possible.

A thank you is also extended to colleagues and friends that have offered insights and experiences to inform our works.

Thank you!

h.lynch@ucc.ie
alice.moore@ucc.ie
Useful resources

- PlayEngland organisation: [http://www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/pubs/design-for-play.pdf](http://www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/pubs/design-for-play.pdf)
- Learning Through Landscapes network-video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BGhXOG20&app=desktop](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BGhXOG20&app=desktop)