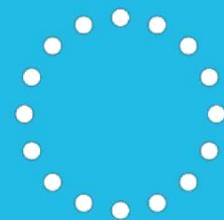


Playing outside, talking to children and young people & making it happen! : Research Bulletin

Outdoor Play, Issue 2



Children's
Research
Network

Children's Research Network News

Special Interest Group on Outdoor Play Research

Welcome to our second Bulletin! The Special Interest Group on Outdoor Play was launched at the 2016 AGM. It is open to all members of the Children's Research Network. The Group is interested in both academic and practice-based research into outdoor play. In the context of this group, outdoor play refers to play in all settings including; playgrounds, parks, rural areas, urban neighborhoods, schools, preschools, back gardens, and foot paths. It is focused on meeting the needs of all children and young people aged 0-18.

The Group has been very busy so far this year. One of our key objectives for 2018 is to develop Irish guidelines on outdoor play design. These guidelines will address a number of themes including: inclusivity, nature play, older children and teenagers, and consulting with children and young people.

We have been very focused on that objective and we have been compiling a body of literature which is both theoretical and practiced based. We are now planning a workshop for September to fine tune the details of the guidelines. Please get in touch if you are interested in participating.

Following our meeting last March, we went on a site visit to Fernhill, a new park which is under development by Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council. Ruari O'Dulaing, Senior Park Superintendent with the Council, brought us on a guided tour, and we discussed ways to maintain natural play opportunities as the park develops.

Our next meeting is on Thursday 12th July 11am-12pm and it will be held at the Network offices on Harcourt Street. Anyone who can't travel to Dublin is welcome to participate through conference calling.

To join the Special Interest Group on Outdoor Play and Participation or for more information on the Group or the workshop we are running in the Children's Research Network, crn@effectiveservices.org.

Jackie Bourke, Chairperson

An Outdoor Preschool

Steve Goode

An outdoor preschool was set up in Limerick City. The preschool is part of a childcare service. It was established to address the shortage of preschool places. Children are now attending preschool for the full two years and often for a whole day all year round. The aim of the preschool was to provide an increased number of preschool places, as well as providing an alternative to 'traditional preschool'.

Playing outside provides benefits for young children such as development of the perceptual system, increased physical activity and improved cognitive functions. Play features in many government policies and the early childhood curriculum framework (Aistear). In these the function of play is to meet targets, i.e. an 'instrumental' view of play. In Aistear, play supports children's learning and developmental.

In the outdoor preschool, as children are observed playing there is so much more happening. The children are learning but it is hard to predict in advance what it will be and to describe what they have learnt.

However, play has an 'intrinsic value' and leads to feeling good, flexibility and adaptability when play is freely chosen. This creates a tension for the early years in that we are judged against learning goals whereas in playing children can be unpredictable and much of play is apparently pointless, for example 'walking across our outdoor space holding hands to have lunch a child pulls away so that they can jump on a tyre, then in it then out again'.

If we understand play not as action and not centered in the child but as an intra-action between the child, the adults and materials then play is both every day, children do it anywhere, but also as a magical act where a child can act out “what if” (Lester 2010). It is difficult using only observations to describe fully what is going on (Thrift 2008). In the first year we have made use of video and photographs, critical cartographies, mapping of the space and children movements through the space with an emphasis on the everyday nature of children actions and not continually look for the special or exceptional (Lester et al 2014).

In the next year it is planned to develop ways to measure what’s happening and how the playful moments can be recorded and promoted. How do children engage with the materials, adults and each other and how it can be described; how do the children challenge the ‘fields of promoted action’ to create playful moments? (Kytta 2002). Planning for play is also problematic. This year areas for climbing, running, jumping has been set up. Small changes are made, and observations are made as to what happens. However, this only captures a small part of play.

Children co-construct playspaces from the materials, themselves, the adults and everything else in the environment and how it all intra-acts together (Barad 2007). It is impossible to predict (or plan) what will happen. But It may be possible to describe many of these playful moments and the constituents that create a playful atmosphere. This is the challenge for the next year.

Report from International Play Association Triennial World Conference, Calgary, 2017
Helen Lynch, PhD (Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, University College Cork)

In September 2017, the Triennial International Play Association conference took place in Calgary, Canada. We were delighted to be accepted to present a symposium at the conference, based on our work in Europe on play for children with disabilities. [Click here](#) to view the website.

Our European group consisted of our Irish team (Helen Lynch and Alice Moore), Maria Prellwitz (Sweden) and Christina Schulze (Switzerland). Our symposium presented on: Promoting or preventing play for children

with disabilities in Europe: Perspectives from policy and practice.

The conference was a four-day event covering many aspects of outdoor play including research, play provision, play in cities, and good practice for play planning. For an overview of conference content and conference proceedings [click here](#)

A special event took place however, on the day before the conference started. The conference committee organised a day trip to local parks and playgrounds, to share their development work with us. On Tuesday morning, 12th September 40 passengers climbed on a bus to head off on our ‘mystery tour’! The tour took in four main parks and playgrounds within the Calgary area: parks were chosen based on interesting new projects, or new thinking in play provision in the Calgary city municipality:

Haysboro: this is a local community park and playground; here the tour involved meeting then local director to hear from her about how the community developed a hub where families can play together, and children can explore nature. One key feature of the local playground, was the provision of loose parts, which are made available to family use on specific times of the week. Sonja Sahlen, Director of Sports and Rec, Haysboro Community Association, play@haysboro.org

East Village & St. Patrick’s Island: East Village playground was an example of a city centre park that was built on the edge of a community open walking and leisure area, beside an allotment garden. The playground and allotment garden were positioned alongside each other and joined by a shared sitting area where people could sit and have coffee and watch the activity around them. This juxtaposition of adult and children activity areas was a successful way to maximize intergenerational use. St Patrick’s Island playground in contrast was across the broad river among the natural landscaping of the park area. While the East Village playground was designed to be an inclusive playground, St Patrick’s Island was generally inaccessible for children or adults with mobility or visual difficulties. Nicholas Dykstra, Project Manager, Calgary Municipal Land Corporation, NDykstra@calgarymlc.ca

Prairie Winds Park: This was a newly re-developed city of Calgary park with an urban landscape and included a wonderful water park with a wading pool and spray area.

Michelle Wong, Parks Capital Lead, City of Calgary, Michelle.Wong@calgary.ca

TELUS Spark Science Centre: The final stage of the tour involved a visit to the science centre which has a whole section devoted to the Brainasium- which included a 66-foot long slide and extra high swings to demonstrate ways to increase risk and challenge in play. Greg Stein, Manager, Daily Programs, greg.stein@sparkscience.ca. He attended the conference. His staff Ola introduced us to the Brainasium.

This was a great opportunity to visit varied forms of outdoor play provision in Calgary. Each park and playground had particular features of merit, and we all came away with many ideas for providing play affordances in different ways. Creative ideas contributed to enriched playspaces that clearly enhanced play opportunities for many users, for example, creating an inverted cone area into the ground to provide different play surface. However, our particular interest was in exploring solutions in designing for inclusion, and only one playground had been designed with this in mind (East Village). For further information contact h.lynch@ucc.ie

Outdoor Play Matters Conference, Limerick Institute of Technology Thurles-April 2018 **Christina Duff**

Limerick Institute of Technology and the Tipperary Childcare Committee hosted the 'Outdoor Play Matters' conference in LIT Thurles on Saturday the 21st of April 2018. The aim of the conference was to promote the physical and psychological benefits of increased experiences and education in outdoor environments for children in early years settings, and to equip educators with ideas and strategies for increasing outdoor play in their settings.

Keynote speakers on the day were Fergus Finlay, outgoing CEO of Barnardos, and Carol Duffy of Early Childhood Ireland. Fergus discussed the broader policy context for outdoor play, highlighting that neither the National Development Plan nor the National Spatial Plan include any mention of places to play. With 3000 homeless children in Ireland this is a major concern, as an increasing number of children are growing up without space or opportunity to play and as a result are being deprived of essential experiences such as learning to manage emotions, sharing, building relationships with

others and experiencing joy. Fergus also said it is hoped that the forthcoming National Early Years Strategy will emphasise children's right to play.

Carol spoke about quality outdoor provision in early years services and encouraged observation and reflection on children's outdoor experiences. A multimedia presentation which included videos, pictures and written accounts of observations provided food for thought on how these experiences could be captured and presented to children's families to highlight the holistic learning and benefits of outdoor play.

Parallel workshops on the day included nature connection games and activities, crafts and ideas for discovering bugs and bees, fundamental movement skills and optimising outdoor spaces. The conference was particularly timely as LIT received accreditation to deliver their Early Years course at Level 8 the previous week. Starting from September LIT will be delivering the Early Childhood Care and Education course at Level 8, with standalone modules in outdoor play, as well as a focus on the outdoors woven through other modules. An outdoor classroom with two outdoor learning spaces on campus is also being built on the Thurles campus.

The Playworker's Mind-set **Harry Shier**

I started my working life as an adventure playground worker in London in the 1970s and went on to work in playwork training and consultancy in the 80s and 90s. Through this I became an activist and campaigner for the child's right to play, where I developed a programme for working with children as expert consultants to the senior management of major recreational and cultural institutions.

When I moved to Nicaragua in 2001 to work with child workers on coffee plantations helping them to promote and defend their rights, I collaborated with local colleagues to adapt this "children's consultancy" model into a new approach to working with children as social researchers, with remarkable results. So, when, in 2012, I got the chance to return to my native Ireland to do a PhD on education rights in the Nicaraguan coffee zone, I took the unusual and, some said, risky step of making collaboration with a team of child researchers the cornerstone of my research methodology.

Though I broke a number of established rules (e.g. "You have to do the research yourself, you can't get someone

else to do it for you”, and “You can’t rely on kids to make these critical decisions”), I got my PhD. As I worked with my team of child researchers on this project, I became convinced that my early life as a playworker had affected my mind-set profoundly, that this ‘playworker mind-set’ had stayed with me and had given me a distinct advantage when it came to doing research in partnership with children. I believe the ‘playworker mind-set’ enables a researcher to cut through the preconceptions and prescriptions of the adult professional world to engage more fully with children’s ways of thinking, and so get closer to a real understanding of children’s own experiences, perceptions and agendas.

And so, when I was given the opportunity to contribute a chapter to a new book on “Researching Play from a Playwork Perspective”, these ideas were at the forefront of my thinking. Using the experience of my doctoral research in Nicaragua as a case study, I set out to explore my hypothesis that “the Playworker’s Mind-set is ideal for doing research with children”. I can’t claim to have ‘proved’ the hypothesis, but I have certainly given it a good airing.

The published chapter starts with a return to my playwork roots in England in the 1970s, and recounts how from those roots grew the Article 31 Children’s Consultancy Scheme. It then describes how in 2001 I took these ideas with me to Nicaragua, where they gradually developed into the research methodology now known as “Transformative Research by Children and Adolescents” (TRCA). I discuss how the epistemology, values and methods of the TRCA approach reflect its playwork-inspired origins, and how it has subsequently developed through practice. I go on to describe my doctoral research project, “Children’s Rights in School: The perception of children in Nicaragua”, particularly the process of recruiting and supporting the team of child researchers, and the striking (and unexpected) findings that emerged on children’s perceptions about their right to play.

The chapter concludes with a reflection on how my ability to hold on to a deeply-rooted playworker mind-set was a factor in making these findings possible, and how this playworker mind-set may be advantageous for other researchers seeking to engage more fully and authentically with children as researchers.

The book is strongly recommended, but if you don’t have access to a copy, drop me a line and I’ll send you an unofficial author’s copy (I’m told this offer is a breach of

my publishing agreement, but I say “sue me”). My thesis is available on my website www.harryshier.net – see below.

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Natural Playground in a Nature Setting

Dr Carol Barron, School of Nursing and Human Sciences, Dublin City University

Children’s outdoor playgrounds are designed to enable children’s play but are also focused on enhancing children’s physical, cognitive and socio-emotional development (Hart 1993) and increasingly are being urged to become more inclusive to meet all children’s needs. National evidence of good practice in this regard should be highlighted, acknowledged and promoted and with this focus in mind, this brief article describes a new natural playground which was opened in the grounds of Turlough Park in County Mayo on Fri 25th May 2018.

The park comprises 30 acres of gardens, parkland and woodland. The garden includes an ornamental lake with islands, riverside walks, terraced lawns and several art installations. The playground was funded by the CLÁR scheme, Mayo County Council and the local community. The natural playground is located in mature woodland, on two levels, within the landscape and in sight of the lake. The area within and surrounding the playground is covered in a broad carpet of wild garlic, currently in bloom.

Risky Play and Natural Playgrounds

Children are challenged and encouraged to take risks in this natural playground in Turlough Park and the growing discussion regarding the benefits of risky play on children’s health prompted Brussoni et al (2015) to conduct a systematic review which examined the relationship between risky outdoor play and health in

children. They concluded that risky play supportive environments had numerous positive impacts on health, behaviour and development. The quality of play spaces, determined by factors such as presence of natural elements (trees, plants), materials or loose parts that can be used by the children (e.g., sticks, wood, leaves), and the autonomy to participate in play activities of their own choosing all influenced, play affordances, children's desire to actually play in the space, and the play spaces' value for health promotion (Bundy et al 2009, Storli & Hagen 2010 and Engelen et al 2013). Risky play supportive environments and play spaces with a multiplicity of natural elements such as this natural playground situated in nature have been shown to stimulate child development, increase physical activity and decrease acute sedentary behaviours in children (Ozdemir & Yilmaz, 2008; Bundy et al., 2009; Engelen et al., 2013) which we are all aware is a major national and international health issue for Governments.

Nature playgrounds affordance and sustainability Outdoor play has a significant place in most children's lives and is typically a setting for social inclusion (Barron et al 2017). We know that natural elements and spacious environments are favored areas for play (Holmes & Procaccino, 2009; Ozdemir & Yilmaz, 2008; Lucas & Dymont, 2010). Children clearly recognize the functions of different landscapes and use them for play (Gibson, 1979) the affordance value offered by boulders, felled trees, clay, stones, trees and shrubs and plants as present in the Turlough Playground is very significant and that's before you include the nature playground equipment. Play in nature or on natural playgrounds is known to promote motor development (Fjørtoft, 2000). Children in naturally designed areas, compared with traditional playgrounds, show lengthy periods of play activities in age-mixed groups that has a positive influence on social competencies (Blinkert, Reidl, & Schemel, 2008). This was clearly evident when observing mixed age and sex groups of children negotiating turn and initiating conversations with children they previously did not know when using the large slide which is likely to become one of the most popular pieces of equipment in this nature playground along with the stone steps beside the slide to run / climb

/ walk back up the slope or alternatively running up the wide pathway to reach the top of the slope.

The play equipment itself is constructed from Robinia and Eastern European Hardwood and high grade stainless steel. It has an attractive grain structure, raw

de-barked tree trunks and a natural, homemade appearance. The wood is smooth and does not give the user splinters. Robinia wood is the most durable European wood specie and has a minimal lifespan of 15 to 20 years. This is important from a sustainability perspective. Whilst it is very important to promote and develop more natural playgrounds it is equally important to have a long-term sustainability plans in place so these playgrounds are maintained for future generations of children at a financial cost that is realistic for county councils to achieve and maintain. On either side of the main entrance to the playground, the site is enclosed with a low wall of growing willow which encapsulates the front and sides of the play space designed for younger children. Once you travel down one of the meandering wide paths, or scoot down the slide to the lower playground (which ever you prefer), the space is only enclosed by nature, (trees and shrubs) with more meandering paths leading from the play equipment into the trees themselves.

Nature playgrounds and inclusion

In an age of inclusiveness, this natural playground appears to meet all requirements, apart from the now expected basket swing, the space also has wide pathways covered with compacted gravel surface with a self-binding gravel to maximize mobility for walking, the use of buggies and wheelchairs. The pathways are on a gentle slope to enable accessibility. The wild garlic, the smell of the trees and bushes all stimulate the olfactory senses. The sunlight dappling through the tree canopies appears to dance over the equipment like a light show and will change through the seasons stimulating children's vision and imagination.

The tactile stimulation available from tree barks, stone boulders, soil, stones, shrubs, trees is vast and should meet the tactile sensory needs of the majority of children. Apart from the sounds of other children laughing and playing, the children using this natural playground can literally hear the wind in the trees beside and above their heads, the call of birds in the trees as well as the odd car driving past. The excellence of this natural playground design and its situation in nature has already been recognized nationally as it has been put forward to the Association of Landscape Contractors of Ireland for a special award.

Natural playgrounds, situated in the outdoor landscapes designed for children's use should obviously consider developmental and play needs, (Herrington and

Lesmeister 2006), in addition the benefits of children's contact with nature and the unique contributions that natural playgrounds situated in the dynamic changing environment of nature can offer on a daily and seasonal basis also need to be acknowledged. Because of the situation of this nature playground within a mature wooded area, the sensory stimulation play affordances are extremely high as well as the more traditional physical activity and developmental benefits.

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Dublin City Council 'Outside the Box' & Re-imagining Play Space Initiatives

Debbly Clarke – Play Development Officer – Dublin City Council

The Dublin City Play Plan was launched in May 2012. The plan is underpinned by UNCRC Article 31; the child's right to play. The vision of the Plan is that Dublin will be a child-friendly and playful city where children and young people can enjoy the right to play.

Dublin City has a child population of 69,957 children less than 12 years of age in (80,029 under 14 and 101,619 under 18). This presents the very real issue of access to quality playgrounds throughout the city in parks, housing/flat complexes and open spaces. To this end Dublin City Council (DCC) has adopted a play led

approach to providing an alternative to standard fixed playgrounds. In alignment with the Dublin City Play Plan, this is achieved through ongoing involvement of children and young people. This type of project is implemented through a consultative process regarding the design and planning of innovative, cost effective solutions to providing daily and/or regular access to inclusive and accessible play experiences within local streets, parks, green spaces, housing and flat complexes.

Imagine it!

As part of the implementation of the Dublin City Play Plan, Dublin City Council has been working with communities throughout the city with regard to thinking differently when it comes to upgrading and refurbishing existing playgrounds that have fallen into ill repair and become dated and limited in terms of play value. 'Outside the Box' project involved re-imagining and redesigning spaces to facilitate play and will contribute greatly to the implementation of the play plan, in particular theme 2 within the plan which promotes a collaborative approach; Working together to ensure that Dublin is a child friendly and playful city.

Make it happen!

This type of initiative began in 2015 when the first two play projects were completed and officially opened in Bishop and York Street flat complexes. Soon after Poplar Row was completed in June 2016 and Mount Brown was completed in January 2017. These play facilities are mainly the result of DCC's efforts to support communities (including children and young people) to re-imagine and redesign play spaces through a participatory consultative process. The key focus of the project is on re-imagining and redesigning local spaces and places for play where children can experience and enjoy self-directed free play that supports their learning, growth and overall development and wellbeing.

The action and design plans developed within this process are individual to each site as they vary in size, landscape and location. Launching and/or celebrating the completion of these play facilities was as individual as the sites themselves. Some communities opted for the formal ceremonies which involved the current Lord Mayor, local councilors etc. Alternatively, there were low key activities which took on the format of a local street party focusing mainly on introducing the new play facility to the community by facilitating a modest play event with games, activities and refreshments. Regardless of the type of 'opening' ceremony, the key message was to

introduce these new facilities in terms of the underpinning the concept and meaning of play and supporting children's play as a 'right'. This process acknowledges the work of all involved especially children and young people in realising the ideas they had put forward to improve play opportunities in their local area. Additionally, the type of provision is different depending on the location of the facility e.g. play facilities located in housing and flat complexes are for the most part exclusive to the local community whereas play facilities located in public parks are more available and accessible to the general public.

Bishop St: Since 2012 Bishop St Residents had been contacting DCC regarding provision of a safe place to play for the children and young people in their local area. An tArdmhéara, Críona Ní Dhálaigh praised the new play area designs and said, "I congratulate all involved in designing and facilitating this new play area in Bishop Street Complex. It is great to see that local children have now got access to an area where play is possible, fun and safe. Tá súil agam go mbeidh siad ag súgradh anseo ó lá go lá.'

York Street: Located within an inner city flat complex, this site had been a derelict and disused roughly tarmac space which had previously been a playground. Local residents had been requesting play facilities for a number of years for this site. The subsequent redevelopments at York Street was also supported by the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) as the project is within the catchment area and in alignment with the aims of the Recreation Education and Community Health (REACH) RCSI Programme which was established in 2007. On 9th December 2015, an tArdmhéara, Críona Ní Dhálaigh and Professor Hannah McGee, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) officially opened the newly designed play space and community garden in York Street Flat Complex, Dublin 8. Local children from York Street and from St. Enda's National School, Whitefriar Street, also attended this event.

Poplar Row: This significantly small playground had extensive damage and wear and tear and was completely unfit for purpose. Again, local residents requested an improvement on this facility and agreed to engage in the 'Outside the Box' initiative in order to improve play opportunities at this site. There was no formal or informal opening of this newly developed

facility, however since its completion it is used regularly by local children and young people.

Mount Brown: Located in one of Dublin's first 'stone house' developments, this playground was quite small in size and limited to providing for a very young age group. The landscape was challenging and complicated in terms of levels and access. As part of the consultation process the overall potential of the site was explored and it was agreed to extend the playground out into existing open space and use the changing levels to develop play opportunities.

The local residents group agreed that a low key 'street party' event would be the best option for officially opening the play facility. This involved a 'street games' workshop, refreshments and 'Fairy Doors' workshop where over 25 fairy doors have been placed on the large wall facing out onto the playground. Almost all are still intact apart from the ones which are in the main traditional 'climbing route' of the wall for local children enjoying hide and seek and chase games.

Ross Road: A traditional playground had been historically located at this site, however it was demolished approximately by the early 90's and remained as a disused lot until it was again brought to the attention of DCC by local residents as a potential site for a 'play'. Given that there are 2 key city Parks and playgrounds in close proximity albeit requiring adult supervision for appropriate age group, it was agreed between DCC and local residents to develop the site in order to compensate for the lack of open space for street play and 'free play' activities for children as this flat complex is in the heart of Christchurch and subject to a high volume of busy city vehicle and tourist traffic. By October 2017 a new and innovative 'play space' had also been developed at Ross Road. This site was officially opened in May 2018.

Working Together!

The overall project was coordinated and managed by Debby Clarke, DCC Play Development Officer in collaboration with DCC Parks & Landscape Services; Les Moore City Parks Superintendent, Sean Redmond Parks Superintendent & Donal O'Conner, Kieran O'Neill Senior Executive Parks Superintendent, Gerard Geoghegan Project Estate Officer, DCC Area Offices; Rose Kenny Executive Manager, Brian Hanney Assistant Area Manager, Brian Kavanagh Area Housing Manager, Peter Murphy Project Estate Officer, Peter Ryan Project Estate

Officer John MacEvilly Housing Maintenance Manager, Hugh McKenna Housing Finance Manager, Joe Mullins Area Maintenance Officer, and DCC Community Officers Gina O'Brien, Declan Hayden, Martin Taylor, Mary Lynch, Fran O'Shea & Carmel McCartney.

The innovative and organic approach by the following companies in developing this type of playscape has been vital in developing the type of spaces that allows play to happen in a spontaneous and natural way. All of the developed sites as set out above, are now maintained and managed by DCC Parks & Landscape Services and DCC Housing Maintenance (depending on location):

- Engineering works were carried out by BA Steel (Bishop & York St Play Areas)
- Playground Installation and Design Works were carried out by: Silvabuild Design Ltd - Bishop & York St Play Areas
- Play and Leisure Services - Ross Road Play Area
- The Children's Playground Company - Poplar Row and Mount Brown Play Areas
- Art and Landscape Architecture' - provided support for workshop and consultative services - Sophie Gräfin von Maltzan of 'Fieldwork & Strategies- York St, Bishop St, Mount Brown & Poplar Row Play Areas
- Funding was provided through Dublin City Council Housing and Parks Departments and Play Development, DCC Local Area Offices discretionary funding, Department of Children and Youth Affairs Capital Funding towards DCC 'Outside the Box' Play Initiative.

York Street Play Space: This committee is made up of local residents; Gerard Doyle, Janice Kiernan and Therese Roe as well as Maria Kelly (REACH RCSI Programme), Debby Clarke (Dublin City Council Play Development Officer) and Gerard Geoghegan (Dublin City Council Housing Department).

Ross Road Play Space: The committee is made up of local residents; Sabrina Wright, Ingrid O'Reilly, Corina O'Reilly, Jacinta Burke, Catherine Wright.

Poplar Row Playground: An informal committee was set up by local resident Sue Mangan in order to initiate the refurbishment of the existing playground. A number of additional local residents participated in consultation workshops that were focused on the design and planning of the play space.

Mount Brown Playground: An informal proposal from local residents was led by Vanessa Leonard and this was followed up by more formal support for the Ceannt Fort Residents Association who had worked on the initial playground develop approximately 10 years previously. The newly developed playground project was led by the following members of the Ceannt Fort Residents Association; Heather Illand, John Lane, Jean Early, Joe McPartlin and Ade Adekunle.

Hopefully, no individual has been missed within acknowledgements and if this is the case, sincere apologies for any names omitted as it is not intentional.

Bishop St Playground: This playground was developed in response to issues regarding safe space for play which was further supported by a petition signed by over 70 local residents. The playground consultation process was supported by local 'play' committee; Catherine Kane & Lisa Cloak, 'Paddy' (of course!) and numerous members of Bishop St Local Community.

Why!

Developing and realising these projects is example of best practice in demonstrating how local authorities can respond to the needs of its citizens, especially children and young people to provide the following support with regard to 'play' provision:

- Increase children and young people's daily access to challenging outdoor physical active play opportunities by increasing the variety of play experiences currently available
- Provide more inclusive and accessible opportunities for play and encourage children and young people's integration through play
- Provide spaces where children can engage in self-directed free play which greatly enhances their social, emotional development, improves resilience and supports freedom of choice, decision making and independent mobility
- Provide children and young people with enriched and varied play experiences which build on their ability to assess and take risks, develop resilience etc
- Provide a space that can be shared by and address the needs of the wider community which creates a sense of belonging and enables children and young people to be active citizens in their local communities whilst also increasing adult's awareness and understanding of children's play.

Three years on, these facilities are still in place and for the most part are well used by local children and young people.

All of the above outlined redesigned/refurbished newly developed play areas provide an alternative to standard fixed playgrounds which is inclusive and accessible and welcomed by the local community. These spaces provide an outdoor natural environment where children and young people can experience 'free play' activities and enjoy play for play's sake." For further information, please contact: Debby Clarke, Play Development Officer, Parks & Landscapes Services, T: (01) 2225396: Email: Debbie.clarke@dublincity.ie

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Play and Recreational needs of Children and Young People growing up in Kildare

Dr Carol Barron, Assistant Professor, School of Nursing and Human Science, Dublin City University

The last two decades has seen Kildare experience the second fastest growing population in the country. Kildare has the highest level of young people (aged 0-24) in the state with the 4th highest rate of 0-4 year olds, and the 2nd highest rate of 5-12 year olds, in the country (Kildare Local Economic & Community Plan 2016 – 2021). In light of its population profile Mr Simon Wallace, Parks Superintendent for Kildare County Council commissioned research to identify the play and recreational needs of children and young people in Kildare to guide and inform the development of a county play policy.

The research methodology employed a based on a rights-based approach, focusing on research with, rather than about, children and young people. In line with this approach, a range of predominantly qualitative participatory methodologies was utilized to elicit first-hand data from 411 children and young people across the five municipalities of Kildare between the ages of 3

– 17 years of age who took part in 23 consultation workshops. Parents play a key role in children's access to outdoor play spaces and 1,257 parents living in Kildare, who collectively parent 2,525 children contributed via an online questionnaire. In addition, key stakeholders both internal and external to Kildare County Council took part in another two workshops. The main findings and recommendations are now summarized.

The health benefits of outdoor play for children are well known; physical activity to reduce sedentary lifestyles and childhood obesity (Lobstein & Jackson-Leach 2006); reducing the symptoms of Attention Deficit Disorder (Taylor & Kuo 2009) and maintaining positive mental health amongst teenagers (Muñoz, 2009) amongst many others. Thus, outdoor play has a significant role to play in improving and maintain the health and well-being of children and young people and parents across Kildare deemed outdoor play as essential to their children's health and well-being. The built environment and its infrastructure is seen as pivotal to children's access to play and recreation resources specifically; housing estate design, lighting and paths. Back gardens remain the most common play space for young children under 12 years of age which supports the need to include garden space in any new housing developments.

Playgrounds and parks remain important spaces for children's play from the child's perspective and similar to international findings (Barron 2017), parents and children reported accessibility issues and the availability of suitable play and recreation spaces for use by children with special needs. Forestry areas within Kildare are actively used by parents and children for physical activity play with chasing and hide and seek games being the most common activity undertaken. Waterways such as canals are used as recreational spaces by children, young people and their parents and the most common recreational activity taking place is walking.

Young people (12 – 18 years) across all municipalities in Kildare feel 'unwelcome' in certain public spaces (playgrounds, shops, shopping centres, restaurants and cafes) by virtue of being a 'young person'. This societal view of young people is not unique to Kildare and follows more international findings; however, it should be addressed within the planning and development of play and recreational spaces and places throughout the county. Finally, the key factor as reported by the children and young people in Kildare to enable them to engage in outdoor play and recreation is having friends or peers to play or spend time with.

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Limerick Outdoor Initiative

Carol Duffy, Early Childhood Ireland

This initiative is a collaboration between Limerick Childcare Committee and Early Childhood Ireland funded by Healthy Ireland. Limerick Childcare Committee proposed an outdoor initiative to promote a shift in focus from infrastructure to practice when thinking about Outdoor Play.

They identified a need to promote an understanding and appreciation that an early years curriculum can be implemented the same as if not to a greater extent outdoors compared with indoors – raising awareness that outdoor play is not just for break time.

Limerick Childcare Committee recognised that early years care and education settings were well placed to play a part in Healthy Ireland's partnership remit to create an Irish society where everyone can enjoy physical and mental health, and wellbeing.

LCC in partnership with CYPSC, and Limerick City and County Council, secured funding to carry out an Outdoor Play Initiative. This required an outdoor play mentoring and training programme to aid the development of quality outdoor provision within early years settings.

Following a successful tendering process Early Childhood Ireland were contracted to develop and deliver the programme. Carol Duffy an Early Childhood Specialist with particular specialism in Outdoor Play and Learning was designated to deliver the programme between January and March 2018. The timing and duration of the programme was determined by funding conditions.

All 200 services in Limerick were invited to submit an expression of interest to participate 32 EOI's were received, 6 were randomly selected to engage in the programme. These services included a mix of urban and rural, private and community, full day care and sessional settings.

Programme Format:

- Over an 8-week period Jan to Mar 2018
- 4 Cluster Training Sessions
- 3 On Site Visits
- 1 Family/Community Event per setting
- Number of Children Impacted: 270
- Number of Educators mentored during On Site Visits:29
- Number of Educators attending Cluster Training Sessions: 16

Challenges

The challenges encountered in this programme are from my experience replicated nationwide across settings notwithstanding that outdoor provision has been improved in many settings.

Poor Outdoor Policy and Practice

The vast majority of the cohort group had little or no previous training in Outdoor Play and Learning

In the main outdoors was seen as a break from the curriculum rather than part of it. Poor understanding of linking outdoor experiences and play to curriculum documentation. The initial focus of all services was on infrastructure with little or no awareness of underpinning, values, curriculum approach or stimulating natural rich play environments. (Hannaford 2006, Sandseter 2010, White 2016)

Wellies were provided in each setting but no designated outdoor clothing was provided for children or adults in any setting. This was particularly prevalent and problematic for babies.

Problematic Outdoor Environments

None of the sessional services had direct access or line of sight from their rooms to the outdoors. One Creche had limited direct access from some of the rooms but was poorly resourced. One Creche had direct access from each room but it was being underutilised.

Some Outcomes

The aim of the programme was to meet each service where they were at and work to improve quality at their pace and capacity. In this regard every service made improvements and gained new knowledge and ideas for practice. The combination of cluster meetings and mentoring visits was very successful. What follows is an example of one settings experience on the programme

The educator team in this setting transformed their practice during this programme.

- They gained an understanding and appreciation that the curriculum can be implemented very effectively outdoors – that outdoor play is not just for break time!
- They were very open to new learning and invigorated by what they were noticing in children's play outdoors (due to the provision of loose parts and the longer time spent outdoors)
- They provided lots of new loose parts and recycled materials for the children to explore and manipulate.
- They began to really see the children at play outdoors and identified children's increasing skills and their growing funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll, & Armanti, 2005)
- They started compiling Learning journals with the children which captured their thoughts, ideas and experiences outdoors.
- They held an exhibition and open day for Family/Community which was a terrific success.

Recommendations

- While Outdoor Provision in Ireland has somewhat improved over the last few years there is still cause for concern regarding the quality of young children's outdoor experiences within ECEC.
- Modules on Outdoor Play and Learning should be included across the range of ECEC training and qualifications. Training/Support needs to be provided to lecturers and trainers to build expertise.
- More of these types of CPD programmes need to be provided
- Due to the diverse nature of sites and settings on site mentoring is a very effective method of training and support and should be factored into programmes where possible.
- For quality to improve and to maximise benefits from Capital Funding Grants for outdoors, services need support in understanding the wide-ranging considerations and elements of quality outdoor provision.

This programme highlights once again the considerable need for appropriate training and mentoring in the area of quality outdoor provision. Far from just providing a space many of our current early years educators need support in developing knowledge and skills pertinent to

the provision of quality outdoor provision for the children in their care.

Bringing childhood classics back into play

Irish Independent, April 3rd, 2018

Freelance journalists Peter McQuiere recently interviewed Dr Carol Barron and subsequently Debby Clarke for an article featured in the Independent Health & Living pages promoting the revival and promotion of traditional games as part of children's play. The article also included the issue of children's play as a right and involving children in the design of places and space to play. To read the full article [go here](#)

In the era of iPads and playdates, how many old-school outdoor games have survived? Peter McGuire asks if reviving these traditions could be the key to fixing our obesity crisis

"Tip the can, free the gang."

"What time is it, Mr Wolf?"

"Mother, may I?"

These cries will be familiar to most adults, bringing to mind long days of playing on the street. We learned these games from slightly older friends or siblings and they gave us our first sense of autonomy: we, rather than any grown-up, controlled what happened.

But in the era of iPads and playdates, how many of them have survived? And if we could persuade our kids to return to these old favourites, might it improve our childhood obesity crisis?

"We know that not all children like sport, but all children do love to play, so games - especially games with an emphasis on running - can keep them fit and healthy," says Dr Carol Barron, a registered nurse, anthropologist, lecturer at DCU's School of Nursing and Human Sciences, children's play researcher and chair of Súgradh, an organisation promoting the rights of children to play. "They want to play outside, and they love playing in nature, particularly park and forestry areas. Of course, the children aren't playing games with fitness in mind - they're doing it because it's fun."

The old games are resilient. For her work, Barron has delved into the Schools Manuscript Collection, an extensive archive of folklore collected by children across the 26 counties between 1937-8 for the National Folklore Collection at University College Dublin. She also drew upon Eilís Brady's (1975) work 'All in! All in!' a selection of Dublin Children's Traditional Street-Games with Rhymes and Music, the only published source on Dublin

children's play in the 20th century. Barron's work on chasing games was carried out with Susan Gannon, a mature student taking the BSc in Health and Society at DCU.

So, what has survived, what has transformed and what has ended? "There have been some changes in children's playing games, but they are more gradual than people think," Barron says.

"Chasing is so common and every day that it can become invisible in its ordinariness. Chasing games remain the most common play activity in school playgrounds and on the streets, both in Ireland and internationally. Red Rover and British Bulldogs - games familiar to many adults - are still played in every school ground. Chasing game Relievio was recorded in Ireland in 1894, in the Schools Manuscripts in 1937, in Brady's 1975 work and by our own research in 2007 and today. About a quarter of the games children played in 1937 were chasing games. Tag, tig and tip the can are all still around. I also collected many examples of kerbs - a game where children try to hit the football off the kerb - back in 2007 and 2008, and it's still played today."

A game called 'Mother May I', built around movement and where the players might be told to run, walk, hop, skip or crabwalk, features prominently in the 1937 Schools Collection; Barron says she encounters it less often today, but it hasn't disappeared entirely. Meanwhile, 'What Time Is it, Mr Wolf?' - a chasing game where the children get progressively closer to the player chosen as Mr Wolf and are eventually chased until one of them is caught - may have undergone a few name changes, but the rules and format have stayed the same. Rounders (a bat-and-ball game similar to baseball) is still popular, and hopscotch and skipping games, both of which might date back hundreds of years, are going strong. Marbles appears to be in decline, with Barron finding "very few examples" in her extensive research.

There are challenges for children who want to play freely, but Barron is wary of the notion that technology has destroyed play. "That's not a new idea," she says. "In the 19th century, we blamed national schools and the coming of the railways. In the 20th century, it was cinema and TV. Today, we hold social media, games and computers responsible; yes, there are some problems with these mediums, but they are here to stay, and we have to help children use them in a healthy way."

She accepts that lifestyles have become more sedentary. "In many countries, parents are worried about traffic and stranger danger. Some schools have restrictions on

running because of injury and litigation concerns, or because they only have a small yard - although children usually run anyway. But the biggest problem for kids is having the time and opportunity to play."

Modern children play a lot of imaginary games, but today we can see more influence from TV, Barron says. "They might, for instance, re-enact The X Factor, and that's fine. Kids have fantastic imaginations and, once they have friends to play with and a safe space to play in, they can thrive. Adults need to recognise that play is vital for children."

The Heritage Council runs a scheme to get children out of the classroom and out playing in nature. For more details, [click here](#)

So, what are the obstacles to play?

Children's games aren't just good for their fitness; they also encourage imagination, creativity and teamwork. There's a huge body of international research which shows that children learn best through play, rather than chalk and talk, and this concept is increasingly being embedded into the primary school curriculum.

Play isn't just a nice idea for children; they need it. Play helps children to develop their life skills and peer relationships and, indeed, article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child says that every child has a right to play.

But there are impediments to that right being exercised and, while many adults might wistfully recall their days of roaming freely, children are more restricted today.

Dr Carol Barron recently worked with Kildare County Council to develop a play and recreation policy, which involved consulting with over 1,200 parents online and over 400 children and young people in person. Children with disabilities as well as children from the Traveller community were included. Barron is now working with Limerick City & County Council on similar work.

Barron found that, when it comes to playgrounds, children love slides, swings, climbing frames and, in particular, birds-nest swings where a bunch of children can all climb on together. Sandpits and seesaws were less popular. Children with special needs want more than wheelchair-accessible swings; they may also need sensory gardens and calm, quiet spaces in their playgrounds.

However, Barron points out that play is about more than just throwing up a few playgrounds. "It is about having a space to play, whether a back or front garden, a cul-de-sac or street. Children and young people want well-lit spaces and safe footpaths. We need to keep

communal green areas, and we need to welcome children and young people to them. It may even be that play spaces are located on the roof of an apartment block."

In 2004, a National Play Policy required all local authorities to put play and recreation strategies and place, and most have now done so, with children's voices more prominently heard in local development plans.

Debby Clarke is the play development officer for Dublin City Council, which organises an annual play day to highlight the importance of children's play and to support parents in creating more opportunities for their own children to play.

"Central to our strategy is consulting with children and young people about what they want," says Clarke. "They need a space that feels safe to them. Play facilities and spaces are required in new residential developments; it is essential that places are set aside for social infrastructure.

"We're working closely with other departments and agencies including the Office of Public Works, the Department of Education, An Garda Síochána and The Ark Children's Cultural Centre to make sure children's voices are heard."

In 2017, DCC opened Weaver Park in Dublin 8 which includes a skatepark, playground and green spaces for all ages to enjoy, and they're currently working on a new play park at St Audeon's near Christchurch.

"Children need to play every day," says Clarke. "There are spatial and time obstacles, but the aim of our play day is to help parents adapt everyday play to their own circumstances.

"There are good summer projects and community and voluntary organisations helping young people to play. Ultimately, we need streets and spaces designed for children to come out and play." For full article [go here](#)

Saferplay Course

The free online SAFERPLAY course has now launched and is open to everyone. SAFERPLAY is a European project, funded by the European Commission's Erasmus + programme, which has as main objective to develop a BOC (Badged Open Course), on innovative training in the design, installation and maintenance of safer and challenging play areas.

The fully online course is intended for architects, designers and landscape architects, installers and maintainers, manufacturers of playground equipment and surfaces, play areas risk assessors and inspectors,

students and teachers involved in recreational and leisure activities, local and regional public administration, consumer authorities, and bodies in charge of recreational and leisure activities in schools, kindergartens, hotels, etc.

In addition to training, this innovative tool will provide interactive forums for users to facilitate the exchange of experiences and collaborative learning. The programme consists of two routes:

1. Training in the design of play areas, intended mainly for professionals involved in design, such as architects, designers and landscape architects, students and trainers, manufacturers, and local and regional public administration.

2. Training on installation, inspection and maintenance of play areas, and intended mainly for installers and maintenance companies, manufacturers, risk evaluators and play inspectors, local and regional public administration and consumer authorities and organizations in charge of leisure and recreational areas.

These two routes will be taken by different learning paths and students may choose modules from any of the itineraries according to their interests and needs. Once students finish a module, they will be rewarded with a diploma. At the end of the course according to the established itinerary, they will get a final diploma. To enroll in the course visit www.saferplay.eu

Call for papers *International Journal of Play*

The International Journal of Play will be publishing a special issue on Outdoor Play and Learning and are inviting authors from all disciplines interested in this area to contribute to this special issue. Areas of interest in outdoor play and learning include, but are not confined to:

- Physical risk-taking
- Engagement with nature
- Art and nature
- Health and development
- Pedagogical approaches and interventions
- Policies related to play and nature
- Innovations in theory, methods, measurement, or critical appraisals to play and nature

The guest editors for the Outdoor Play and Learning special issue to be published in 2019 are Shirley Wyver

(Macquarie University) and Ellen Beate Hansen Sandseter (Queen Maud University College).

"Manuscripts of up to 7000 words are welcomed. We encourage submission of empirical studies, high quality reviews (e.g. systematic reviews), and theoretical position papers. We also welcome shorter articles (up to 2000 words) on innovative practice, memoir, and reflection. Deadline for submission of full papers is June 30th. Please check the International Journal of Play website for details [go here](#)

What's on *Young Dublin Assembly*

The purpose of Young Dublin Assembly is to celebrate achievements of Dublin City Council within the frame of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, in particular, Article 31, which focuses on the child's right to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts. The day will showcase examples of work that highlight the broad range of Dublin City Council's practice in this area. Thinking about inclusion as a core aspect of our practice, the day will offer opportunities for rigorous discussion and supportive connection with colleagues from different spaces and places in Dublin city. Young Dublin Assembly is an initiative of Dublin City Council, Arts Office/Arts, Education and Learning Policy and supports Creative Ireland Programme/Creative Youth Plan and Cruinniú Na nÓg. For further information and booking [go here](#)

Ombudsman for Children office celebrating 25 years of Ireland's ratification of UNCRC

The Ombudsman for Children Office (OCO) is marking 25 years since Ireland ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child making a promise to all children and young people to prioritise their rights and hear their voices. OCO is encouraging and welcoming children and young people to celebrate with them by providing support to Learn, Participate and Explore their Rights. For further information and booking [go here](#)

Child in the City 2018 World Conference, 24th – 26th September 2018, Vienna, Austria

Two members of the Outdoor Play and Participation Group will speak at this year's Child in the City Conference. Dr. Helen Lynch, of University College Cork is speaking, on the theme of Planning, Space and

Participation and Debby Clarke, Dublin City Council Play Officer is speaking on the theme of The Right to Play. WienXtra and the city of Vienna are inviting you to attend the 9th child and the City World Conference held from 24th – 26th of September in Vienna. This international event is a joint project of the Child in the City Foundation and the City of Vienna.

The world conference, which takes place every two years, is a key opportunity for children's professionals, city planners, geographers and policy makers to share knowledge, good practice and research findings from the various disciplines that are important to the shared aim of creating child-friendly cities. For further information and booking [go here](#)

Play Wales - SPIRIT 2018 - Play in public space, 25 October 2018, Cardiff

Playwales are inviting interested parties to join them in their annual Spirit conference. Spirit is a conference filled with inspiring keynote speeches, lively discussions and practical workshops about children's play. This year's keynote speakers include:

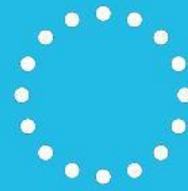
- Tim Gill, Rethinking Childhood
- Huw Irranca-Davies AM, Minister for Children and Social Care
- Adam White MBALI FLI, President Elect, Landscape Institute
- Samuel Williams, ARUP, co-author of Cities Alive.

Who should attend?

Playworkers and play professionals, people working in communities, youth and community workers, town and community councils, housing associations, community regeneration officers, and anyone with an interest in or responsibility for children's play. For further information and booking [go here](#)

A National Playday

Dublin City Councils have organised a free National Playday family event. It will be held in Merrion Square Park on Sunday 1st July 2018. The theme for this year's event is; celebrating 25 years of supporting article 31; the child's right to play so be there or be square!



Children's
Research
Network

Outdoor Play Interest Group

This bulletin is produced by the Special Interest Group in Outdoor Play of the Children's Research Network for Ireland and Northern Ireland.

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If you have items you would like included in the next bulletin or have any comments or questions, please contact the Children's Research Network at crn@effectiveservices.org.