Research Dialogue: Resilience through outdoor play and participation

Facilitator
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Practitioner Research Circles: Building outdoor provision

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Practitioner Research Circles – Learning with, from and about children and families

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When children are given a voice, when they are listened to and heard, when they have real meaningful choice and autonomy around their play then we are offered research possibilities that will touch our hearts and minds.

Our research comes alive for us and impacts immediately on our thoughts and actions.
Early Childhood Ireland Research Circle Rationale

- Fleer 2001 found that practitioners have a strong preference for working with each other because they gain more insights from those with similar experiences and challenges.

- The aim of this research circle is to work in a collaborative progressive manner to reflect and research outdoor provision – In dialogue with each other, investigate the data to gain more insight, grounded analysis, interpretation and theorizing.

- As advocates for children, childhood and outdoor play we aim to build a body of evidence of outdoor research that enriches and develops our own work and that of the wider sector.
Who are these researchers

• These members of Early Childhood Ireland are committed professional educators, advocates for children who are consistently seeking to connect with and understand the children in their care.

• They seek to learn from them and about them

• To discover professional explanations for their practice

• To describe their practice and ask questions of what they observe and experience
Documentation/Data Collection

Practitioner research data can be collected through a number of sources

- Observations
- Documentations of stories and experiences
- Reflections with staff parents and others
- Group dialogue with research group
- Literature
Mac Naughton (1996) Research carried out by practitioners is owned by them and is more likely than formal research to have an impact on practice. Practitioners become more analytical and critical about their own practice while at the same time generating useful and relevant knowledge about teaching and learning.

Clark and Moss (2011) identify 3 principles of practitioner research: Participatory, reflexive, and embedded in practice.

Pascal (2011) says it must be systematic, replicable and rigorous rather than anecdotal, partial, and imprecise.
ECI Outdoor Research Circle is in its infancy

In its first seven months we have

- Set Up Research Circle 8 members - 3 Meetings
- Held 4 Showcases with 110 participants
- Research Presentations made at
  - OMEP
  - ECI Research Day
  - EECERA
  - CRINI

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Some Research Questions for Year 1

• Affordances of Outdoor Play from birth to 3
  Embodiment of Experiences
  Developing Funds of Knowledge
  The Role of Rituals in the Outdoors

• Loose Parts (Their impact on experiences and development)
• Indoor Outdoor And Beyond
• Deansrath (Utilising local community spaces)

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Presentation of Sample Research Projects

• Nature Affordances Birth to 3
  Carol Duffy ECI

• Impact of Loose Parts on Experiences and Development
  Mags Coogan The ABC Club

• Integrating Inside Outside and Beyond
  Nikola Cullen Beverton Preschool

• Utilising Outdoor Community Spaces
  Deansrath Family Service
Some Topics currently being researched

- The impact of the use of outdoor Community/Local Spaces (from the perspective of Parents, Staff, and Children)
- Changes to play patterns following the introduction of natural open ended materials.
- Impact of Outdoor Education/Training on practice
- Reflections on Learning – how approach to risk has changed
- Impact on parents, educators, and families of sharing Learning Stories with families.
Implications

For practice

• Improved outdoor provision for young children
• Building research expertise within the sector
• Confidence building among practitioner researchers
• Opportunity for partnership between academic researchers and practitioner researchers

For policy

• Increased availability of Irish based research
• Opportunity for meaningful consultation between policy makers and educator/researchers
• Research highlights the quality practices that are possible and the challenges that face the sector.

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Questions for dialogue

• What do you as researchers feel this group has to offer you?
• What do you as researchers feel you have to offer to this group?
• What do you as parents or adults interested in children’s rights and development feel this research would offer you?

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Upcoming Outdoor Masterclasses and Conference
20th May 2017 Conference

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Outdoor play spaces: children with disabilities and social inclusion

Helen Lynch
University College Cork
Dr. Helen Lynch
Outdoor play and playspaces: sites for social inclusion?

Department of Occupational Science & Occupational Therapy, University College Cork

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When all else is equal, children prefer to play outside, with nearby friends (Kilkelly 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**
Policy context:

**UNCRC- General Comment 17**

Since Irish Play Policy (2004):
- UNCRPD (2007)
- Aistear (2009)
- UNCRC & General Comment no 17 (2013)
- Right from the Start- early years strategy (2013)
- Better Outcomes (2014)
IN EARLY CHILDHOOD: 
PLAY ≠ LEISURE/SPORT

1. CHILDREN HAVE A RIGHT TO HAVE A SAY IN PLAY: 
   PLAY DESIGN, PROVISION, MEANING

2. PLAY IS FUNDAMENTAL IN EARLY DEVELOPMENT, 
   HEALTH & WELL-BEING

3. WELL-BEING IS ABOUT PLAY > EXERCISE

4. PLAYSPACES= playgrounds, parks, gardens, schoolyards

5. INCREASING RISK-RICH OPPORTUNITIES FOR PLAY

   COMBINING children's rights + children’s well-being

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Accessibility and usability of playground environments for children under 12: A scoping review

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Abstract

Background: Playgrounds are important outdoor environments in many communities during childhood. However, playground spaces often do not meet the needs of typically developing children or children with disabilities, resulting in social exclusion for many children. Aim/objective: This study explored the evidence regarding accessibility and usability of playgrounds for children of all abilities, to identify factors that enable or constrain social inclusion in community playgrounds. Materials and methods: A scoping method was used as little research in this area has been collated and synthesised. Scoping reviews are effective for exploring and synthesising broad and varied methods of inquiry around a phenomenon of interest. Results: A total of 14 key articles were identified and two major themes emerged: (i) accessible playground environments – features and factors; (ii) from excluding to including – making playground environments usable. Findings indicate that numerous environmental barriers contribute to making playground environments inaccessible and unusable for many children, particularly children with disabilities. However, playground design is identified as a significant factor in enabling inclusion. Conclusion: Occupational therapists are in an ideal position to advocate for children’s occupational right to play, by combining knowledge of environmental barriers with an understanding of disability and specific knowledge of occupation. Through focusing on advocacy and change at policy and community levels, therapists can work to maximise social inclusion in playground settings.

Key words: Children’s rights, health behaviour, occupational justice, play spaces, universal design
NEED FOR DATA ON CHILDRENS LIVES:

THAT INCLUDES THE CHILDS VOICE IN RESEARCHING PLAY NEEDS
Play and Playspaces research, UCC

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
  Kilkelly, Lynch, Moore, O’Connell & Field (2015)

Inclusive play (inclusive environments)
- COST Ludi European Project
Clark and Moss (2001) Listening to Young Children The Mosaic Approach

<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 freedom 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 layout 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 landscaper.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From desire to design!

‘Cúl an Tí’ Oscaílt Oifigiúil:
Tuesday, 7th June 2016 at 11.00 am
NEED FOR GUIDELINES ON CHILD PARTICIPATION IN DESIGNING FOR PLAY (not just consultation)
Play and Playspaces research, UCC

Playgrounds (built environment)
- Scoping review - accessibility and usability
  Moore & Lynch (2015)
- School yard - inclusive design
  Cagney, Carroll & Lynch (2015)
- Fitzgerald Park: usability
  Enright, Keating, Lynch (2015)

Play in Nature (natural environment)
- Heritage Council Project
  Kilkelly, Lynch, Moore, O’Connell & Field (2015)

Inclusive play (inclusive environments)
- COST Ludi European Project
Fitzgerald Park playground project 2015-2016

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

Cork’s First Inclusive Playground Announced

for Fitzgerald’s Park, Cork, in June 2015

Cork City Council has today announced the development of Cork’s first inclusive playground that will enable children with disabilities to play alongside able-bodied children. The new playground will be located within the site 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 in best practice for the provision of inclusive playgrounds in Ireland. A total of €300,000 will be invested in this new playground facility.

The public, outdoor playground will be an age-appropriate and safe environment that will encompass sensory 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 architect-led design and project management teams to tender for the contract to bring this concept to life. (see etenders.gov.ie)
Project with 11 children ages 12 to 16 years
All attend a school for children with moderate/severe intellectual disabilities
<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sound Wheel</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Wheel</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bench/Seats</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ladder</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basket Swing</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swings (3-12)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swings (4+)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Triple Bars</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pyramid</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climbing Wall</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Balance Poles</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Castle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slide (Wide)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Slide (Enclosed)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Springer</td>
<td></td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>See-Saw</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Running</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sand Play</td>
<td></td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wobbly Jetty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</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

Good playspace design

- Play preferences of children with different conditions
- Accessibility
- Usability

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Gill (2014) review of evidence of benefits of engaging with nature:

‘The significance of playfulness as an engagement style is perhaps this reviews most important contribution to the literature’

Gill, 2014, p. 19
Children and the Outdoors

NEED TO INCLUDE NATURAL ELEMENTS IN OUTDOOR DESIGN FOR PLAY

CONTACT WITH THE OUTDOORS AND NATURAL HERITAGE AMONG CHILDREN AGED 6 TO 12: CURRENT TRENDS, BENEFITS, BARRIERS AND RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS

Commissioned Report by the Heritage Council
Play and Playspaces research, UCC

- Playgrounds (built environment)
  - Scoping review - accessibility and usability
  - School yard - inclusive design
    - Cagney, Carroll & Lynch
- Play in Nature (natural environment)
  - Heritage Council Project
- Inclusive play (inclusive environments)
  - COST Ludi European Project
    - Play and Children with Disabilities
European COST Action: Ludi TD1309

2014-2017:

32 countries across Europe

http://ludi-network.eu/
NEED FOR GUIDELINES ON UNIVERSAL DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION OF PLAYSPACES FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES
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
Implications for policy and practice: outdoor playspaces

• DATA:
  – National consultation with children under 8 on play needs
  – Funded programme of research on outdoor play

• POLICY:
  – Policy on outdoor play provision: needs to encompass idea of PLAYSPACES (broader than playgrounds or sports centres)

• PRACTICE GUIDELINES:
  – Guidelines on outdoor playspace design from universal design perspective, usability, accessibility, nature
  – Children's participation in planning and design

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In development......
Questions for dialogue

• HOW DO WE ENSURE OUTDOOR PLAY IS NOT HIJACKED BY ADULT PERSPECTIVES ON HEALTH, EXERCISE, SPORTS, LEARNING?
Questions for dialogue

Carol Duffy
• What do you as researchers feel this group has to offer you?
• What do you as researchers feel you have to offer to this group?
• What do you as parents or adults interested in children’s rights and development feel this research would offer you?
• How can we best develop research partnerships between early childhood practitioners and academic researchers?

Helen Lynch
• How do we ensure outdoor play is not hijacked by adult perspectives on health, exercise, sports, learning?
Questions for dialogue

1. Implications arising from presentations
2. Next steps for policy development/practice improvement/research
3. How can CRN support this?
   a. Is there scope and interest for establishing a special interest group to further build on today’s dialogue?
   b. Publishing a resource, policy brief
   c. Holding a training event
   d. Other
Dr Helen Lynch

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