Borderland Voices and Practices: The Ambiguity of Children's Participation in School Grounds Greening

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Abstract

Commentators on children's experience (largely the urban experience of the developed countries) indicate that publicly accessible open space for children is being limited due to commercialization, litigation, fear for children's safety, and changes in lifestyle. One of these open spaces facing change is the school grounds. Evidence is drawn from a Scottish based multiple case study of 22 school grounds projects. One finding is that when participation is a project goal, children can be involved at high levels of decision making and activity but that adults are seen to maintain a strong gatekeeper role. A typology of utopic practice is offered with respect to children's participation in grounds development. The analysis suggests that different project hopes and expectations can have multiple, ambiguous, and sometimes conflicting effects of children—a moot point for proponents of education for sustainable development who consider the need to address real world issues to be a central tenet.

Résumé

Des commentateurs d'expériences d'enfants (dans une large mesure, l'expérience urbaine des pays développés) indiquent qu'il y a peu d'espaces verts accessibles publiquement aux enfants, dû à la commercialisation, à des contentieux, à la peur pour la sécurité des enfants et aux changements de style de vie. Une étude écossaise, basée sur une étude de cas multiples, sur 22 terrains d'école, en démontre l'évidence. Une constatation veut que lorsqu'un des buts vise la participation, on peut mettre à contribution les enfants à de hauts niveaux de décision et de participation sans oublier que les adultes doivent assurer un rôle ferme de surveillants. Une typologie de pratiques utopiques est offerte à l'égard de la participation des enfants au développement des infrastructures. L'analyse suggère que les divers espoirs et attentes du projet peuvent avoir des effets multiples, ambigus et parfois conflictuels sur les enfants – un point discutable pour les auteurs d'une proposition d'une éducation pour un développement durable et qui considèrent le besoin d'aborder les problèmes du vrai monde comme étant un credo fondamental.

Without participating in some form of public as an integral part of schooling, students will leave schools both without the skills to form public spaces and without the desire to form such spaces, since they would not have experienced the shock of active selfhood that comes from "appearing" in a location around a common project. (Schutz, 1999, p. 90, speaking of Maxine Greene's recommendations about fostering public spaces)

Empirical evidence from the field of the geography of childhood encourages us to see how children's identities and lives are "made and (re)made through the sites of everyday life" (Holloway & Valentine, 2000, p. 18). Massey (1998) reminds us that spaces are produced through interconnections between local and global social relations. Taking these points together, we can say spaces and identities are co-produced through webs of connections with wider social and global processes. This article seeks to explore how efforts to reshape school grounds are driven by the participants' hopes for what these spaces should become and what children's place in relation to adults and the environment might be. In addition, it seeks to offer the view that the opinions of children are important in planning and educating for sustainable development but that when children's views are taken into account, the process throws up elements that are ambiguous and sometimes contested.

Research on children's use of space indicates there are some trends that might concern us. Children are becoming more car-dependent (Hillman, Adams, & Whitelegg, 1995) with their social and recreational activities being increasingly more adult-supervised fuelled by increasing parental anxiety (Valentine & McKendrick, 1997). While access to unsupervised public (both natural and built) environments appears to be decreasing, school ground spaces have largely stood their ground in the UK as a place that provides activities that are crucial to academic achievement, social interaction among peers and general adjustment (Pellegrini & Blatchford, 2002). In this light, school grounds are distinctive places that are still a key aspect of children's lives. They are marginal, yet at the same time fairly integral to, the running of a school; they are relatively open, publicly accessible to varying degrees; critically, they are outdoor spaces used at break times for the most part but also for a variety of other activities before, during and after school. Valentine (1998) notes that the outdoors of schools are under a less controlling regime than the indoor class room with teachers being more prepared to turn a blind eye to children's activities here. Despite the obvious social, emotional, cognitive and physical benefits to children, some reduction in "recess" times in the UK and the USA has been noted (Sindelar, 2002) while grounds and playing fields are more likely to get built upon or sold for development year on year (National Playing Field Association, 2004). In response, various interest groups see school grounds as places that need to be preserved, enhanced or more radically changed.

Grounds Change

The research on school grounds change and development also lays claim on school grounds reflecting a variety of (sometimes competing) concerns for their improved function and effect. Moore (1986) advances the cause of enriching grounds as a place of play and learning with an emphasis on
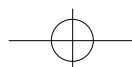
(among other things) variety, diversity, and natural elements. Titman (1994) provides important insight into how valuing school grounds differently can carry symbolic meaning for children and members of the wider school community. Education for sustainability discourses offer different versions of a curricular claim on the space. Bartlett, Hart, Satterwaite, de la Barra, & Missair (1999), for example, claim school grounds can be training grounds where sustainability can be demonstrated and learned. Casey's (2003) in her review of literature on school grounds, notes the recurring theme of grounds as compensatory spaces of safety, fun, sociability, exercise, and education. She goes on to suggest that various interest groups should question the capacity and appropriateness of school grounds to fulfil so many functions.

Kenny (1996) provides a list of the issues that are currently seen as the starting points for grounds changes: the need to deal with "bullying", to address the "aesthetic impact" of the school site, to improve opportunities for play, to deal with issues of safety, and to increase the potential of the site as a teaching resource. A point to note here is that these purposes may not be compatible with each other or with what all stakeholders might desire. Another key point here is that many schools grounds projects may not always be solely about upgrading the physical environment or see restoring locally appropriate habitats as a central issue (Dyment, 2004).

But there is a way of potentially conceiving of quite a wide range of grounds change project types as "green" in some sense. Covitt (2004) suggests that education for sustainable development should be future-oriented, fostering understanding of the interconnectedness of economics, ecology, and social equity. Education for sustainable development should use a learner-centered, democratic approach and empowers students to address real world issues. Tilbury and Wortman (2004) emphasize that genuine participation including decision making in education for sustainable development is essential for making sustainable changes. This suggests that projects with any number of different foci have the potential to be classified as forms of education for sustainable development once there is some authentic levels of democratic participation and learner-centred engagement with real world issues. But how will we know authentic participation when we see it and what are the real "real" world issues?

The diverse claims for the significance of school grounds and the arguments made for the need to change them indicates that it is a contested space wherein relations between the school and wider society, children and adults beyond the school gate find a shifting expression. It is a territory that is always ready to be lost or won amid concerns for accessible open space and local habitats. Hart (1997) comments that children's participation in environmental change is not a smooth process. He argues that children need to be involved in the process as a whole so they can learn from the failures as well as the successes. But, allowing children to learn from failures may not be as viable these days. Grounds developments happen amid other concerns for children's safety:

> The land around our nation's schools, their grounds, is a critically important childhood environment. […] For most children, school grounds are the first public environment of which they have sustained experience. For many, they represent a safe haven in what is perceived as an increasingly dangerous world. (Learning through Landscape's Annual Report, 1996-1997, inside cover).

The Study

The research took a two-phased, case study approach in that it was holistic, contextually well-defined and field-oriented (Stake, 1995). The first phase involved intensive fieldwork in a playground in one school. This instrumental case was visited regularly and considerable time was spent in the grounds as part of almost every visit using ethnographic and participant observation techniques. Phase one also involved making a visual audit using still photography of children's day-to-day use of the playground before and after changes occurred. The second phase of the project involved at least one visit to each of 22 other schools engaged in grounds projects; photography was used here too but space here does not permit an exploration of the visual data in itself. The distinctive criterion for selection of these cases was their reputation among practitioners (designers, activists, educators and a range of other informants from organizations and schools) for having involved children in decision making and participating in change. 19 of these schools were primaries, two were secondary schools and one was an urban nursery school. 12 of the primaries were small and in rural settings. There was one larger rural school. The schools came from six different regions in the central belt of Scotland and the Grampian-Highland region and children interviewed were almost all within the age range 7-12 with relatively equal numbers of boys and girls. During school visits I usually entered classrooms first where I adopted an outsider-facilitator role in order to understand how these projects worked. Groups of children also took me on 'guided walks' of grounds while providing a commentary on the purposes and processes involved in their development. For each site, I conducted interviews with at least one key adult informant and also conducted a survey of the views of the children who were considered central in terms of their participation in the project. I particularly wanted to get a view of children's perceived degree of involvement in decision making in projects. Indeed, Shaeffer (in the preface to Tilbury & Wortman, 2004, p. ix) notes that alongside the three key areas of sustainable development—economy, environment, and society—that culture is an underlying dimension. Researching the processes of education for sustainable development can therefore be illuminated with a focus on how cultures of children's participation and child-adult interaction support shared decision making. To address this I used a version of Hart's (1997) ladder of participation as a framework for encouraging children to think about and evaluate their position in the culture of decision making
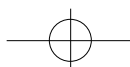
in their projects. This ladder (summarized below) with supplementary child-accessible language was presented and explained to the relevant child-participants.

8. Child initiated, with shared decisions with adults: children have the ideas and come to the adults for advice, discussion and support.
7. Child initiated and directed: adults may be available but do not get involved.
6. Adult initiated, shared decisions with children: children are involved every step of the way.
5. Consulted and Informed: children are consulted but the project is designed and run by the adults.
4. Adults decide and run the project: The adults are the initiators in getting the project going and do most of the running.
3. Tokenism: children are asked to be involved but little or no account of their views is made.
2. Decoration: children take part but don't understand the issues.
1. Manipulation: children do or say what they are told to but have no real understanding of the issues.

After any clarifications requested from the children, they were invited to privately record one number (from 1 to 8) that best represented the participation of those involved. Children were encouraged to consider any number as a valid answer and that there were no "right" answers. One key finding has relevance for this article: the single most commonly recorded choice from all children participating in grounds projects was level 6: "Adult-initiated, shared decisions with adults." Almost two thirds—63/108 children—selected this level with the remaining choice accruing to levels 4, 5, 7, and 8. This sub-set of the data came from an analysis of 12 school grounds projects across six schools mostly in rural areas; the relative incidence of levels remained the same in non-rural schools. On first appraisal, this is an encouraging finding, but we should remember that all cases were categorized to some degree as 'best practice' by those who were familiar with the cultural movement to change school grounds in Scotland in the late 1990s. Further details on the particulars of the findings from this part of the study, the methods and methodology used are available elsewhere (Mannion, 2003a, b). For our purposes, it points to the real sense that children in these selected cases were active in the decision making in most respects of projects—there was a widespread feeling among most children that they were included in the process almost every step of the way.

Dyment (2004) is right in saying relatively little is understood about the process of student involvement in greening projects and the scope and authenticity of their participation. The finding about participation levels (above) sheds some light on what is possible if not widespread in all projects —we can surmise that children's participation was not as important an

issue for other cases. But the finding shows that children's involvement is possible and that there are ways of ensuring that they do not experience their participation as tokenistic or mere decoration. We should consider the finding of considerable evidence of positive participation in the light of Matthews, Limb and Taylor's (1999) study of children's participation generally in the UK context. Their view is less encouraging indicating that a culture of children's non-participation dominates. Similarly, Devine's (2002) study in Irish primary school contexts found that children's indoor time and space were quite rule and regulation bound. She found there was no prevailing culture of active participation with children being typically identified in terms of deviance and deficit, or innocence / vulnerability. It appears that some school grounds were offering something different as a site of participation and engagement in the public sphere with opportunities for addressing social, economic and environmental issues and perhaps reconfiguring adult-child relations in the process.

In the study, participation experienced at level 6 meant that projects were adult initiated: it was the adults who functioned as gatekeepers or brokers of children's participation by acting as the main drivers, coordinators and managers of projects. From my discussions with children and adults, it was apparent that adults were the ones to delineate what and how participation proceeded. Even when children's participation in decision making had extensive scope, it appeared critical how adults worked with and related to children. This led me to look more closely across sites in a generic manner with a view to understanding the different trajectories of projects, their goals and purposes with respect to adult-child relations. Using the evidence from interview transcripts, the photographs of sites, the guided tours, and the familiarity that came from being in one site for a considerable time I went on to construct a typology of project practices. I will attempt to show how diverse plans, approaches and practices effected children in terms of who they could interact with, what sort of participation would follow, and what roles they might take up. The typology will show how different hopes for change—and actual changes on the ground—appeared to drive projects in particular directions with consequences for children, adult-child relations, and relations with the environment.

The Utopics of School Grounds Changes

Data on grounds projects came in a variety of forms:

- researcher-taken photographs;
- interviews with children,
- adult stakeholders (parents, designers, and other volunteers);
- teachers;

- visits to the 22 sites; and
- participant observation in one site over a 3 year period.

Analyzing this data for cross-case themes alongside an open viewing approach to the visual data resulted in a typology that connected characteristic hopes or drivers for change in any one place and time with likely outcomes in terms of identifications for children. This analysis was empirically grounded but theoretically informed in part by studies of childhood and identification where contemporary images of children and childhood are explored (for example, James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998).

The term "utopic practice" (Marin cited in Hetherington, 1998, p. 108) is used in the typology (Table 1, below) to try to capture the co-specification of place and identity. While no "where" can actualize Utopia itself, places can symbolize aspects of different utopic practices; identities can emerge through participating in these practices. The differing utopic practices (left-hand column) provided identification opportunities or associated essential fictions of the "child-as-participant" (right-hand column)—but they were fictions with effects. The rationales provided for grounds changes often masked quite hopeful views about the "place" of children in these school communities and in society at large.

A Typology of Utopic Practice

| The Utopic Practice of …(the hoped-for place offering …)	Identification Opportunities for Children
… the outdoor classroom	The child-as-pupil
… a 'romantic' and safe childhood,	The child-in-need-of-protecting
… tribal rituals and practices,	The tribal-child
… community well-being and survival,	The child-as-community-hope
… active citizenship and sustainability.	The child-who-makes-a-difference

Table 1.

The presentation of this typology is not meant to establish a reified version of all school grounds developments. There were many rich subtle differences between sites, their purposes and expressed values. The table paints a very distilled and simplified picture but still worthwhile as a strategically interpretive rhetorical tool. At no point did I feel it was viable to claim which of these utopic practices prevailed more than others across sites; I would not be assured in making judgements here such as dominant, widespread, or rare. The very nature of the typology is that it offers a lens on what may be occurring in any one site at a given time rather than a way of codifying the process as a whole or evaluating projects as better or worse. Similarly, in any one project differing view on the process would be apparent from talking to different stakeholders.

Next I take these utopic practice types and explore them in more depth giving examples of each from the data which led to their construction.

Utopics of the Outdoor Classroom. In the study, there were some projects that appeared to carry many of the norms of indoor educational practice into the outdoor school grounds. Examples here included projects about wind speed, the painting of murals of maps of the world on walls, the use of numbers on the ground for play and learning and the outdoor scientific study of biology or habitats. Within these projects, subject disciplines remained strong and learning was constructed via the foundational knowledge generated through science, geography, maths and so on. "Outdoor classroom" project practices sought to replicate many of the didactic tools (numbers, letters, and maps) and subject constructions (science, maths, geography) found within classrooms. For one science based project on wind, anemometers were placed outdoors. Here the grounds function as an experimental space rather than a place offering engagement in a social setting with adults from outwith the school. In the process, children remain constructed as "pupils" studying discrete subjects; there is work to be done and outcomes to be re-produced later in class. In this mode, subject specialisms were strong, then roles responsibilities and relations other than teacher-pupil were less visible and but for the changes to the grounds that mirrored the indoor curriculum, and the additional visits to the grounds that resulted, it was "business as usual."

Romantic Utopics and the Utopics of a Safe Childhood. Some cases exhibited a concern for children's right or need for a happy, safe or innocent childhood. Precluding children from aspects of decision making such as the financial aspects resulted in some cases but adults often had their reasons. In one school, participation amounted to children being involved in the creation of posters to make sure children did not enter the construction area in case they got hurt. On the one hand, it may be critical that children do not take part in dangerous activities. Yet in order to get children involved, there may be some degree of risk that needs to be managed. In another case, where some younger children were involved in painting a fence, the teachers involved were told that they should really have had protective goggles on or not have taken part at all. In the same way, projects involving work with locals and volunteers bring additional concerns for children's safety. The drive for complying with child protection policies and health and safety regulations is beginning to mean some schools find it not worth the hassle. Other schools work to find a way around these problems. On the whole romantic utopic practices emphasize the desire to protect children from selected "adult concerns" and perceived dangers. Romantic utopics are in part fuelled by fears of litigation; these concerns are real for the adults involved in constructing children's participation. There is nothing inherently wrong with seeing children as being in need of care and protection but this may run the risk of precluding children from realities from which they can learn—education for sustainable development's real world issues. Indeed, there was evidence that children can feel let down or disappointed when things go
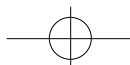
wrong; adults disagreed and were unsure about whether experiences of "failure" such as this were worthwhile:

> *Child 1*: People smashed the windows and it took a lot of money to fix them.
> *Child 2*: The benches were vandalized. We were upset, sad, angry.
> *Child 3*: I was very disappointed.
> *I*: What do you think you have noticed or learned from taking part in the changes?
> *Child 4*: I have been noticing how things can take a long time.

Projects following the lowest common denominator of the discourse of the romantic safe and happy child may be losing out on opportunities for children to learn from failure. Yet, by and large, projects seeking to make changes often required the child to learn some of the language and face some of the problems of the "adult world": for example the problems of vandalism, finance, and safety.

Utopics of the Tribal Child. Some sociologists have offered the tribal child as an image of a view of childhood (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998). This metaphorical description with its roots in anthropology and the study of children's folklore, sees children's social worlds as real if separate places in their own right. Here, children's culture is seen as being represented by a system of signs, symbols and rituals. Projects drawing on the utopics of the tribal child emphasized the need for children to have their own spaces away from obvious adult supervision and control. In the study, one school set aside an area for children to construct their own dens and huts. In various other schools I visited, there were usually teachers who offered the view that the grounds was a space for children and perhaps turning a "blind eye" was the best approach. In Hart's (1997) terms level seven best represents this view. (Children selected this level in only a few cases explaining how they initiated projects themselves but that was unsurprising given the design and selection criteria.) In my participant observations children's creation and maintenance of their own spaces only became apparent over time. Features of the built environment afforded children opportunities for their own games and activities to take place: the kerbs and pavements which were used for chasing games; elevated places that were dry and were good viewing points were used for sitting and eating lunch; less noisy or less busy places were used for telling secrets; specially chosen flat surfaces on the tarmac were used for drawing on with chalk. Natural elements in grounds and the influences of the changing seasons led to a similar variety of child-initiated projects albeit on a small scale:

• protruding stones were pried out of position over some days by using matchstick sized twigs;
• mud slopes were used as dirt tracks for toy cars and trucks;
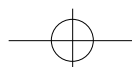
- bushes and trees were used as focal points in games and for hiding behind and climbing on; and
- an "out of bounds" mound was used for standing on and viewing and playing "King of the Castle."

These activities were evidence of how children's own tribal utopics were enacted yet on the outside this school had one of those blank tar-mac grounds seen by some as needing attention by planners and designers. Clearly, children are participating here but there is a low level of interaction with adults. In one school, these activities were taken into account when decisions were made to alter the grounds.

There was other evidence that children's efforts to construct their own games, rituals and cultures were sometimes ignored in efforts to involve children in planning and design. In this example, the installation of a flower bed with plants to encourage butterflies appeared to work in conflict with the children's desire for the maintenance of a much-loved, children's "tribal" space which previously had a high ownership value:

> *Child*: We can't really play there where we used to. We used to pretend we were campin' out. We used to put the coats over our heads and that [the flower bed] got put in the way.

Utopics of Community. Some project practices emphasized intergenerational and intragenerational contact, interaction between non-school staff, parents and children. In one case, the development of school grounds was part of a ploy to arrest the plans for school closure: at Christmas time the decorated village tree replaced the school bird table signifying the connection between community well-being and school survival. In another, children discussed how there was such a strong "family" atmosphere in the school and the community at large that they could not maintain a distinction between adults and children as was inferred by the Hart's (1997) ladder exercise. In these cases, the place of relations between children and a variety of other adults in grounds development was strong.

> *Child*: The teachers are different at the weekend.

Here children's involvement is contextualized as a part of a wider identity politics of place that seems to be based on strong ties between adults and children that went beyond narrow constructions of pupil-teacher or even parent-child.

> *I*: And would you look at those parts of the playground and say "that's the bit my Dad did"?
> *Child*: Well, not really. I would say the whole thing is brilliant and everyone's put a lot of hard work into it.

Utopics of Citizenship and Sustainability. Here practices associated with citizenship and sustainability were usually combined and afforded learning opportunities that were linked to action projects seen to make a difference to society and/or the environmental health and biodiversity. While other projects may also have been education for sustainable development according to our definition, these projects were explicitly so. Projects in the study emphasizing these aims tended to be also strong on the rhetoric on children "having a say." There was a sense that children moved outside of the narrow construction of pupil in these projects and related to the world in a different way. In one school, children grew organic herbs and vegetables which they planned to sell later locally. A child from another project recollected that design work involved "more than just letting your imagination run wild." I felt some practices meant children began to understand how financial constraints can effect design solutions. One child commented that the project "made you feel like a professional cos it might happen." Another said, "You don't just stay in the same position, you have a new role." There is a sense some of these children experienced a shift from the traditional notions of pupilhood.

In Scotland, at the time of the study, the funding and support of school grounds initiatives is also driven by a strong environmental discourse. Scottish Natural Heritage, for example, supported and funded individual schools or distribute grant aid to local authorities once the plans are inclusive of certain criteria: the restoration of native habitats, the encouragement of greater biodiversity within school grounds. These funding mechanisms, along with the many other organizations willing to support developments supported a particular "green ethic." At times however, involvement by "green" organizations could mean the loss of a section of playground to a wetland, pond or other newly created area of restored habitat. In one case, a wildlife area became a "no-go" area which some children resented. In another, the involvement of outsider volunteers meant children did not take part in making the desired changes:

> *Child*: We done too much planning and not enough doing. When they decided to do something, they brought in [volunteers/non-government organization] to help.

Evidence of children's extended ownership and responsibility towards the "environment" and towards other species was apparent on many visits I made to school grounds. I met with children who discussed their sense of care for other species and for the cleanliness of their school environment. On "walkabout" interviews, I found out that one school had pets that needed "out of school care" at the weekends; another child voluntarily picked up litter from her playground as we walked; another child told of how he weeded a garden tub during his playtime "without being asked"; another explained how she was the one who ensured litter bins were provided in the playground and proudly brought me to see a newly created compost heap.

Grounds projects that emphasized the utopics of citizenship and sustainability over other utopic practices were eclectic in their focus. Despite this eclecticism, there are some striking commonality and homogeneity of views among the advocates in this category even if planning and making changes was not always easy. They tend to share agreement on these five aspects:

- that human beings are but one element in the systems that makes up the school grounds site in particular and the planet in general—the environment has intrinsic value and needs to be enhanced, conserved or restored;
- that the social and environmental "landscapes" are interdependent;
- that our identifications are linked to specific places;
- that children in particular deserve a better environment; and
- the children themselves can be participants in this change with others both now and in the future: the idea that children can make a difference.

Grounds as Borderlands

Perhaps we need to consider school grounds projects again in the light of the suggestion that education for sustainable development should be future-oriented and foster understanding of the interconnectedness of economics, ecology, and social equity. Some questions arise with respect to the underlying dimension of culture. Which form of utopics would we now consider to be more authentic within the education for sustainable development frame? Are some forms of utopic practice more legitimate sustainable development than others? Is there a time and place for leaving school grounds to children themselves or do we need adult others to make the interconnections possible or visible? Do we need to reposition children in roles other than pupil in order to foster education for sustainable development? Given the contested nature of education for sustainable development (Jickling, 1992) and these utopics it may be our answers are not so easily arrived at. In fact, it may be the very conversation needed to answer these questions is the first step on the way to getting started with education for sustainable development. For Sandercock (1998), an advocate of planning and design *with locals*, the journey is all-important—a never-ending journey *towards* utopia—an indeterminate place but a place of hope, equity, and justice.

Another feature of education for sustainable development is the use of a learner-centered and democratic approach that empowers students to address real world issues. The evidence shows that some "real" issues for children were not the same as this for adults and vice versa. Another question arises. Is some degree of authentic children's participation a necessary ingredient for a grounds project to be effective in education for sustainable development terms? I hope the answer to this is less muddied by my analysis. Sandercock's (1995) claim is that in our multi-ethnic cultures, we are plan-

ning for multiple publics and we need to attend to diversity. If we are to achieve sustainability in a broad sense of the term, what we need is a conversation between the inhabitants of a place and the landscape itself. Sandercock (1995) argues for a more radical, local, and participatory focus in design work where voices from the borderlands can be heard in planning. Voices of those who are not usually seen as planners—children among other silent stakeholders—are important in this task. Similarly, children's involvement beyond the planning stage—from making changes to maintaining sites—can be easily precluded.

I have attempted to sketch out these utopic practices which were inclusive of planning and decision making processes and their effects. I have attempted to show how children were being made and remade through efforts to change these places; these places also changed as a result of the new relationships, roles, and responsibilities children and adults took on. What the analysis suggests is supported by the insight from geography and the sociology of space (Massey, 1998): that places and identities co-specify each other. The analysis suggests adults initiating grounds changes should pay respect to children's opinions and allow space for their participation. Shifts in culture between adults, children, and communities may result.

From the analysis presented here, planning and enacting schools grounds changes is likely to be a contested process. The key idea that potentially gets lost in the embrace of any one utopic practice may be the need to reconfigure the power relations between adults and children and between schools and communities. Schools grounds initiatives create the need for new relationships to be forged between local authority officials, planners and designers, researchers, and other voluntary, environmental and parent bodies. But schools may be reticent to involve children in the messy, difficult aspect of school grounds changes because of their essential view that the child may not be able for the possibility of disappointment should the plans not work out. Adults involved will need to acknowledge there may be degrees of risk and ambivalence involved. They will need to address competing sustainability issues (social, economic, and environmental) and the conflicts that arise between keeping themselves free of litigation, keeping children safe from danger, and involving various stakeholders as participants at all levels of decision making. They may also have to wrestle with conflicting images of who they think children can or should be, what sorts of childhood spaces are desirable, and what counts as a "real" sustainability issue.

Sustainable grounds development calls for a different kind of borderland practice for adults and children within more open-ended and ambiguous partnerships. Greene (in Schutz, 1999, p. 83) points out that a public space is always a project, never quite achieved but always coming into being. Sustainable spaces and cultures for adults and children are similarly emergent. As one child put it (parentheses added) to another on viewing the initial planting of a willow den:

Child 1: When will it be finished?
Child 2: [Without despair] It'll never be finished.

Acknowledgements

Notes on Contributor

Greg Mannion has worked as an in-service educator of primary school teachers in environmental education. In University of Stirling he completed a doctorate on children's participation in school grounds change. He continues to research the connections between space, identity, and learning in projects on inclusion, literacy and adult-child relations.

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