

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 16 ‘GROUNDS FOR UTOPICS’

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The Utopics of School Grounds Changes

The essential subject is only ever a fiction, *but it is a fiction with real political effects*. In ‘real politics’ the pertinent question in the face of ‘an identity’ is not “Is it coherent?” but “What does it achieve?”. (Burgin, 1996, p17, emphases in original)

This appendix provides a more detailed discussion of the analytical rubric presented in Fig. 2. which was given a more general overview in chapter 16 of the main text. Each fictional ‘utopian essential’ is presented as a fiction with ‘real political effects’ (Burgin, 1996, p17) summarised in the table (below). These essential beliefs pertain to adults’ views of children that may constrain or enable children’s potential in creating meaningful identities of participation within their own cultures but especially in transgenerational settings. Each ‘utopic’ is dealt with as a (fictional) category which gets narrated through the rhetorical positioning of sequences of ethnographic evidence from transcripts from interviews with children, personal witness stories, photographs from school grounds and excerpts from newspaper articles. Hopefully, the combined effect of the text is to stimulate thinking among readers about the essential views of children that are operative in their own work while giving a very ‘framed’ (situated, personal) view of children’s participation in schools grounds changes in Scotland in the late 1990s. Being read in the context of the thesis as a whole, it amounts to another performative action of the thesis to enable reader participation in researching children’s participation.

The Essential View of the Child	Approach Taken to Children's Participation
The child-in-need-of teaching	Utopics of the Outdoor Classroom : Playspaces become learning spaces.
The child-in-need-of protection / The child-in-need-of-control-and-direction	Utopics of Safety: design a safe place to play & work; children must remain under supervision. Participatory rule-bound; management and surveillance of anti-bullying, anti-racism, etc
The child-who-should be happy	Romantic Utopics: Adults remove the difficult, contested political aspects away from children - it's not their
The child-who-symbolises-community-hope	Communitarian Utopics: Doing something for the children becomes the motivation for community development, school survival or celebration
The child-who-would-be a citizen (The minority group child who can make a difference)	Utopics of Citizenship and Sustainability: Adults would simulate or make real opportunities for children to have a say. Children make a place better for themselves or some other species
The tribal-child	Utopics of the Tribal Child: Children need space away from adults to do their thing - unstructured freedom and children's own culture are important

Fig. 2. (see also main text, chapter 16). The 'essentials of who we think children are' and the corresponding approaches that may be taken to children's participation by adults or children.

The Utopics of the Outdoor Classroom

The teacher "took a risk" by taking the pupils outdoors ("risks" can also be taken in the classroom!) with the possibility of losing control over them. In the process, however, she demonstrated awareness of the surest ways in which young children learn - through first-hand experience, providing opportunities for active learning via observation or investigation of a familiar environment, and through building on their previous experience. She guarded against the risk of pupils treating the lesson as just another playtime by making them keenly aware of the purpose of the expedition and the expected outcomes. (Laar, 1998, former chief Ofsted inspector.)

The tradition of fear stems generally from our social structure but more particularly from the authority relations considered essential to the process of taming the unruly in the early days of compulsory education. Fear of physical hurt kept most in their desks and attentive. (Fielding, 1997)

Also, included in the plans to enrich the 5-14 curriculum of environmental studies are a weather station, compass rose, and sundial. This [area] would also be conducive to language development work and drama. (From a plan to change a primary school grounds by a head teacher)

Learning through Landscapes is a charity which encourages schools in making improvements to the educational use and environmental quality of school grounds for the benefit of children. While part of their work falls under some of the other categories of the practices of utopics, they have a firm commitment to what I call the 'Utopics of the Outdoor Classroom'. By this I mean a 'colonisation' of the school grounds territory for the purposes of fulfilling the learning needs of the children. Two aspects of this work are noticeable: firstly, mainstream (traditionally indoor) subject areas are encouraged to take the opportunities the outdoor learning environment offers while at the same time, new innovative ways of configuring the curriculum are explored by validating the activities that normally go on in school grounds as part of the informal curriculum (or sometimes the 'hidden curriculum' [Eisner, 1985]). Teachers' roles in making the outdoors part of their regular teaching programme are seen by advocates of school grounds changes as crucial but many

teachers felt inadequately prepared to get outdoors and engage their children in learning of any kind. Often teachers saw the outdoors as a place they might go and do science or some subject-based learning. Less commonly, teachers saw the entire development of the school grounds as part of the curriculum. But some teachers chose to involve their pupils in making changes to their school grounds that went beyond the needs of the learner for new knowledge. By involving the children in digging, painting, and making physical changes to the environment, some teachers went beyond the use of the outdoors as an arena for simulation of planning and design or for scientific experimentation. In doing so they redefined their curriculum to include learning that impacts directly on other people's lives and perhaps the lives of other species. The 'outdoor classroom' idea appeals to some funding agencies, and to local authorities in that it fits into easily understood notions about the role of teachers and schools. Sometimes this rhetoric is employed to advance other utopic practices like the utopics of sustainability, or communitarian utopics (see below). When it does the 'Utopics of the 'outdoor classroom' provides good 'cover' for the strategic use of the school grounds as a public space to fulfil many other objectives related to such things as community development and inter-species relationships. In that teachers and schools rename the outdoor classroom to encompass these other objectives, we can also find evidence that schooling itself is redirected by its outdoor spatialisation wherein learning is communal, situated, locally distinct, and shared in Vygotskian 'proximal zones of development' involving children and their peers, or children and adults in environments that afford open-ended opportunities for learning and action. Instead of top-down approaches to curricular innovation and attainment, locally environment (and weather), locally available expertise, and often large amounts of volunteer work collaborate to define the learning environment:

The project [a school vegetable garden] encourages a healthy diet and has beaten vandalism. "It's also a great leveller," says Mrs Puchalka. "There are no league tables in the garden, everybody mucks in together." (Cruickshank [1998] *Times Educational Supplement*.)

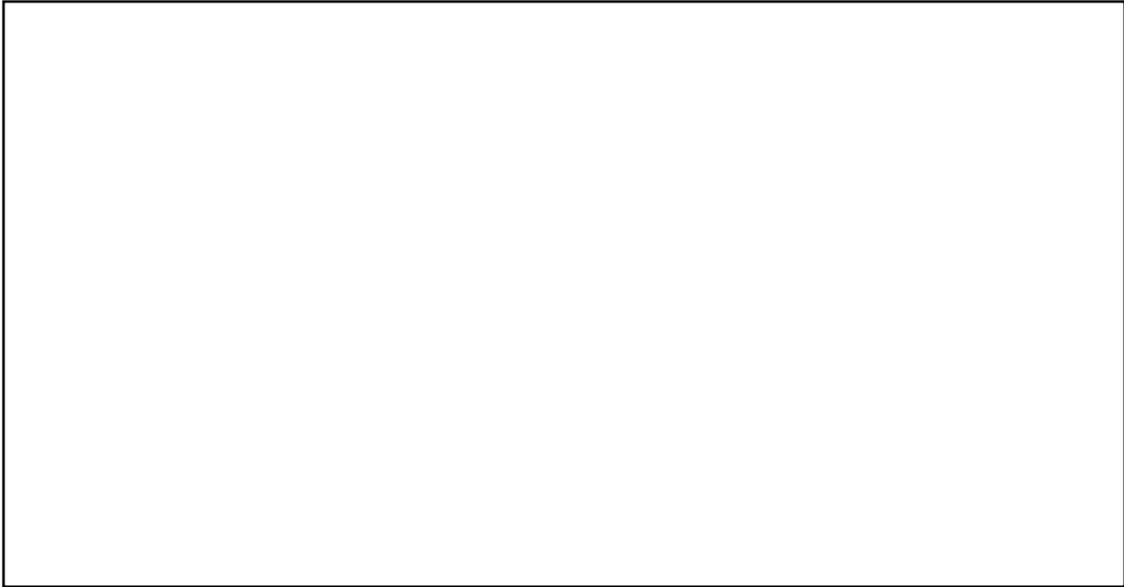


Plate F.1. Scientific experimentations are conducted using wind vanes in the school grounds.

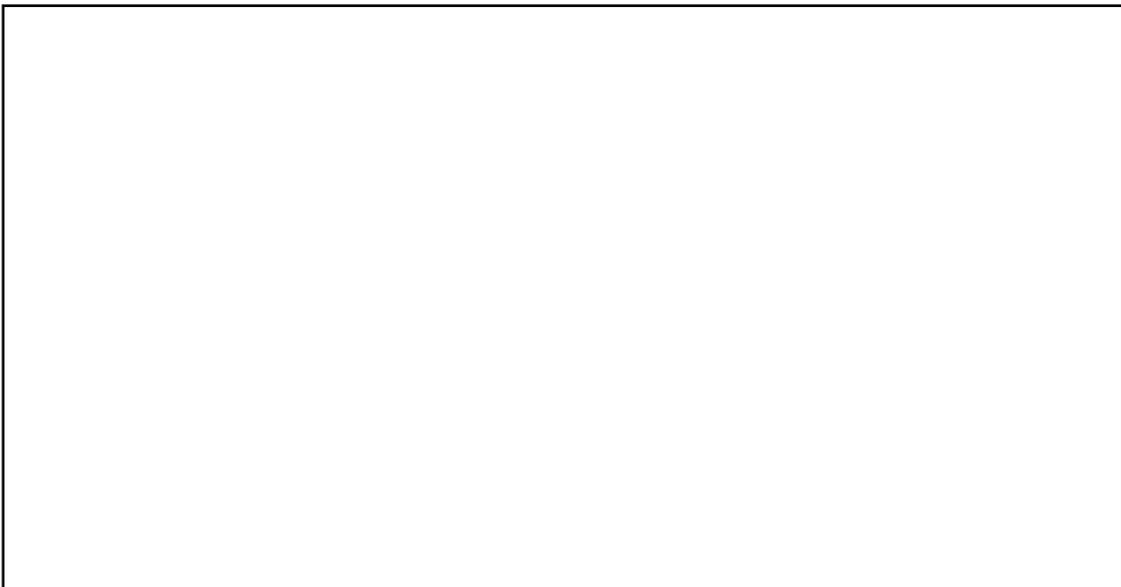


Plate F.2. The teaching of many aspects of the environmental studies curriculum can be conducted in specially dedicated areas. Sometimes these 'Wildlife Areas' are designated as 'out-of-bounds' during most of the rest of the school day to children at play.

As children tend to perceive the outdoors of schools as predominantly places where ‘they play and don’t work’ (primary school child) it is interesting to see how children respond to what could possibly be the curricularisation of their traditional territory by such initiatives in line with the curricularisation of children’s timetables outside of school already noted by Ennew (1994). For some curricularisation may mean the loss of yet another ‘child-only space’. Increases in surveillance and control may be enhanced by overly restricted formations that prescribe play in adults’ terms. Children respond often by ignoring and eluding adult control and ‘doing their own’ thing regardless of the intended purpose of the design. I have seen children sit under picnic tables and make dens; they sit on the backs of seating provided or run across them in games they construct; children have always been able to show me where they go that is regarded as ‘out of bounds’ by playground supervisors in the schools I visited; children will revisit their old primary school for unseen drinking sessions in school huts or bird hides. Adults interested in planning for children’s ownership of spaces will have to acknowledge this elusive, uncontrolled, and imaginative response by children and will do well to consider their own aims in planning and design.



Plate F.3. The enclosure of the outdoors in an indoor environment in a horticultural learning project in a secondary school forms an ‘indoor-outdoor classroom’.

The Utopics of Safety

St Mark's Church of England primary school at Hadlow Down, East Sussex is unable to lock its gates because of a path through the playground that it wants to divert. The school is one of many that, fuelled by heightened anxiety about security after the machete attack on pupils in Wolverhampton and the Dunblane massacre, are pursuing the issue with local authorities. (Stones [1997] *Times Educational Supplement*, Jan 3rd.)

A FOURTEEN-year-old schoolboy has been charged with manslaughter after a fellow pupil died during a playground fight. Darren Carruthers, 16, died in hospital of serious head injuries three days after banging his head on the ground during the scuffle at Heworth Grange comprehensive school in Gateshead. (*Times Educational Supplement*, News and Opinion, Dec 25, 1998)

The land around our nation's schools, their grounds, is a critically important childhood environment. School grounds are the one outside place to which all children have regular access. 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. Far too many children still spend their time outside at school in sterile, largely asphalt environments. (LtL's Annual Report, 1996-1997, inside cover, emphases added)

School grounds changes can arise from changes in rules and codes of conduct for different user groups of the playground: playground supervisors, researchers, visitors, the public, the children. Children's participation in this usually amounts to their participation in changing only some of the rules that effect them. The large gamut of decision making that goes on concerning the playground is conducted by adults. Children's marginality in decision making is demonstrated by their absence in the decisions about length of school breaktime, the decisions about what is permitted in the playground as play equipment, the rights of public access by visitors and so on.

Plates F.4. & F.5. (over) The stick being used by these children is confiscated by a playground supervisor. Decisions about children's safety are made everyday by most adults whose job it is to protect and care for children.

Blank page Supervisors in action page

Mostly, these decisions fall into adult-only decision-making procedures for the same reasons children are excluded from participation generally: they are seen to be too immature to know best, they are not able to make the best decisions about their own safety: in other words, the Western construction of childhood that positions children as ‘flawed’.

I: What do you think of your playground?

Boy 1: It’s boring.

Girl 1: We want to go down the pitch but you’re not allowed

Girl 2: We’re not even allowed bring in skipping ropes or stuff like that.

Stranger Dangers

Child: We’re not allowed down the front cos like there’s all the cars there. And someone could come along and take you away

I: So it’s safer in the back?

Child: Yeah. The teacher’s in here; she’s watching you.



Plate F.6. The arrival of outdoor security cameras and front door security systems to prevent intruders heralds the arrival of a new era in school grounds supervision. One wonders how soon we will have CCTV monitors in the school to oversee incidents of bullying in playground.

My research has involved activities that have highlighted my own awareness of the current fears of 'strangers', particularly male strangers. I have been stopped in the playground myself by a parent who inquired about my presence there. Her concern was that I was a stranger to her and she was concerned for the children. This was despite the presence of a playground assistant in the same space. In another school, the teacher suggested that she come to the playground with me while I tried to take some photographs of the children at play because of the probability of a parent accosting me despite permission having been given by the local authority and a letter having been sent home to the parents. A child in a country school refused to show me where the front door of the school was because she had specific instructions not to talk to anyone over the school wall. Children in another school were warned not to stray near the fence because a group of people had been spotted videoing over the school wall recently; they were 'possibly' tourists. So, there is probably good reason for the rise in interest among sociologists and geographers in the perception of 'stranger-danger' by parents and, perhaps less so, by their children (Valentine, 1997a, 1997b, James, Jenks and Prout, 1998) although the grounds for such fears are far from certain with the risk of child abuse from non-strangers in the home, or injury in car accidents (Pugh, 1988, forthcoming) still the greater 'real' risk. But perceptions are strong motivators. After the Dunblane massacre in Scotland there is a very visible rise in measures being taken to secure schools from visits by such depraved strangers. In one rural primary school a head teacher (female this time) stopped an interview with me to observe a 'strange man' in the car park. His presence was monitored by her until he left the school grounds. Heightened awareness of social dangers to children is television mediated and contains largely negative images of men and their relationships with children. Once, I changed my plans to approach a primary school with a request for permission to talk with the children in the playground because of a television programme that had been shown the night before. 'Liverpool 1', a fictional drama, had depicted the vivid details of how a paedophile had targeted children in a playground for his evil acts. I felt it better to approach the school on a different day. On a similar vane, the Times Educational Supplement (Budge, 1998, p1) has given front page space to research on why men are increasingly less likely to opt for teaching as a career. Budge (1998) refers to research by Thornton that outlines how men fear being misunderstood. They worry about being called a 'dirty old man', about whether their actions would get misconstrued should they cuddle a distressed child. Thornton puts some of this anxiety down to the rise in media interest in sex abuse scandals.

Most primary and secondary schools have made changes to their security arrangements since the Dunblane incident. In most cases, it amounts to the closing off of access points to the building except a monitored one. In some case (where there are teaching heads and urban schools that feel less secure) there is also a buzzer system before access is gained. I have heard of more than one case of cameras being used to check out visitors before entry. All visitors to schools are now required to wear badges of identification while moving around the building or grounds. All researchers, parents, and new staff are now required to have a criminal record check by the police before having access to children though on the ground some of these procedures are ignored or circumvented. While interviewing children I am usually encouraged to remain in a visible setting though not necessarily within ear-shot. One head teacher (also female) remarked apologetically that this was because I was male but that perhaps it was in my own interests to take her advice and remain visible. In this urban school in central Scotland, where the sense of danger from strangers had been heightened by a couple of incidents, children were prevented from using a very wide open space that was part of their school grounds. There are strong forces at work to make children safe which also work to particularly estrange men from the children 'in our care' in schools.

Bully Dangers

"We don't need any more violent toys which teach children how to fight. We need toys which teach children co-operation and how to play together." (Carlton, 1998. quoting a *Families for Freedom* charity member. In *Times Educational Supplement*, February 13th., 1998)

A little fighting and a spot of light bullying can help children 'learn the lessons of life', says the charity, Families for Freedom. Schools are increasingly obsessed with anti-bullying strategies, claims the group. Play-fighting and real fighting are essential if children are to learn how to get along with others, how to manage relationships, and about the responsibilities of being a friend. (Ghoury, 1998. In *Times Educational Supplement*, January, 23rd., 1998)

Cohen (1998) notices that there is often a gap between what adults perceive to be 'children

being children' and children's own interpretation of experiences which may include experiences of harassment or abuse. While Cohen admits that it is difficult to unscramble what counts as aggressive taunts or playful actions, he suggests that playground can be addressed through a number of 'indoor' strategies to help staff at any school deal with incidents and encourage less stereotypical behaviour. The advent of pupil councils, classroom discussions and the development of codes of conduct for the playground are often instigated by adults to address concerns about aggression in the playground. They may not ever aim to encourage greater participation by children in decision making except while within the remit of the adult's concerns: to raise standards, reduce complaints by pupils and parents and the need to be seen to be doing something about a popular social concern - for example bullying or racism.

In one suburban primary school, a group of girls (all aged eleven) took measures to try to deal with the need for some control of the environment of playtime. They suggested to their head teacher that they could moderate on bullying disputes in their playground by offering their services as 'problem solvers'. They later saw the difficulty in mediating in bullying issues where neither side has a clear monopoly on 'a truth'. They changed their name to the 'playground friends'. The idea had been completely their own suggestion following a discussion in class; some of the girls had been bullied themselves in the past. They got pretty much a free reign from their head teacher. Children were informed that they could come to them with their problems and they did. The children themselves timetabled their meetings and generally listened to the pleas for help from 'so-called' bullies. They were aware of the potential for telling lies among their peers. They developed complex working definitions on bullying that were far from legalistic. This child's understanding of bullying appeals to all our own 'working definitions' and yet is not internally coherent as rational definitions go:

I: So what's bullying?

Girl: It's when it continues over a few days .. like not just pushes you *once* or calls you a name *once*. I think it's when people get upset.

I: So its to do with how people feel then?

Girl: Yeah. It's what *they* think we should do about it. For some people bullyin' is fightin' for others it's being called *one* name.

Children's Awareness of the Need for Safety

Children's own views on safety sit in sharp contrast to adults' desires to make things safe, or to make things safe because they believe they must be seen to be doing so or are afraid of litigation, or to make things safe because legislation requires it. Children were very aware that adults have issues around safety, finance and control but recognise their own needs to escape from this regime:

Child (discussing safety in a focus group): Dangerous things are the best things ... if you make something safe you'll think, 'well that's rubbish' and we'll go on something dangerous. So we walk along the top of the fence and sometimes we fall into the nettles.

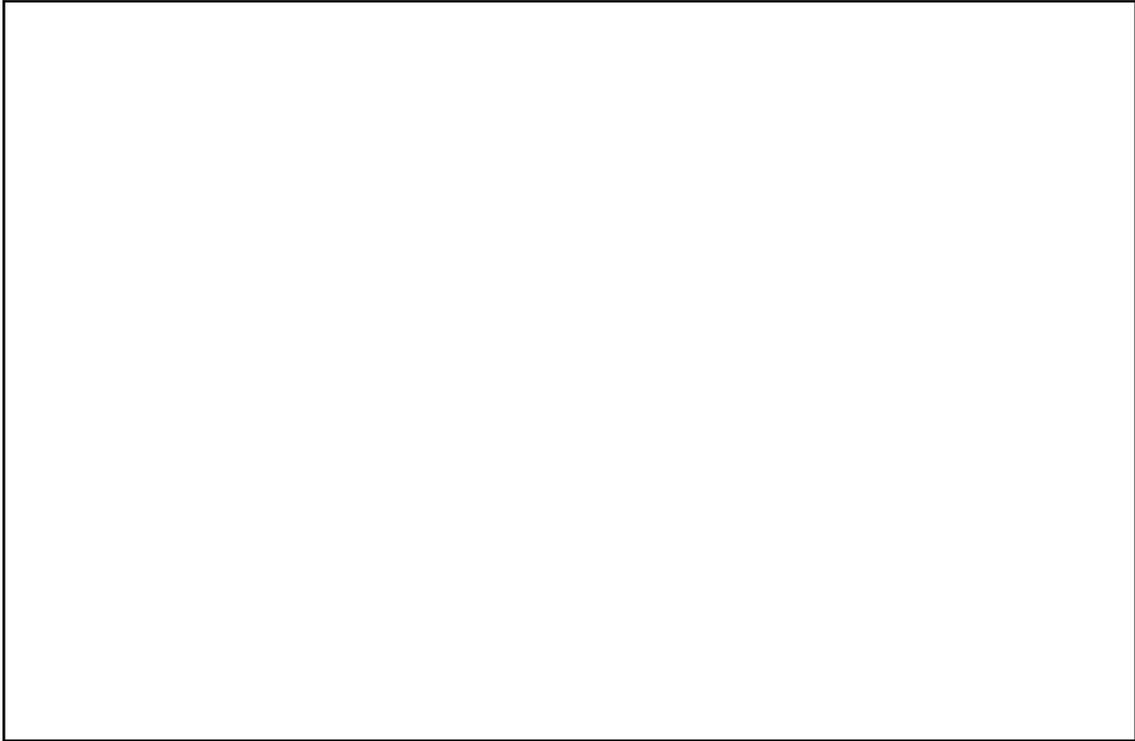
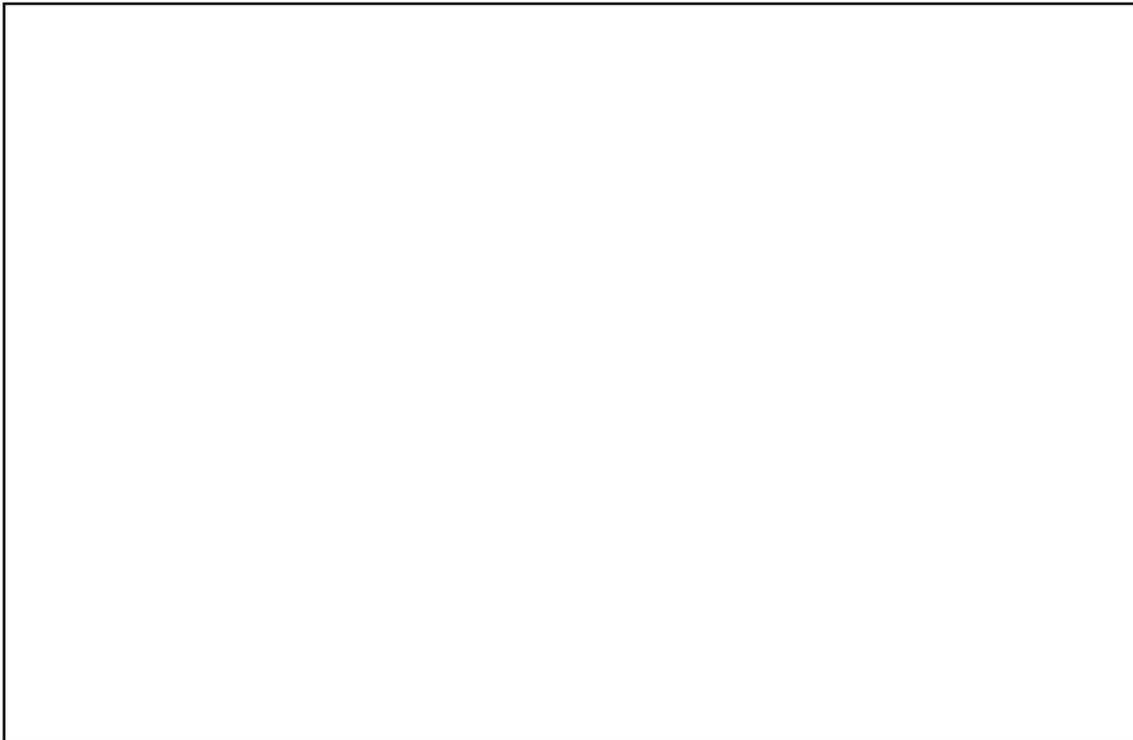


Plate F.7. It is often the case these days that very young children are the only ones in schools to get their hands on tools of any kind. Similarly, nursery and early primary school children are much more likely to have access to climbing equipment than older pupils. One wonders what schools would look like if the challenges sometimes given to very young children were 'scaled up' to be appropriate to children in the upper end of the primary school. Plate F.8. (below) This school commemorates those who died in the 'Dunblane Massacre' with a memorial garden at their school entrance.



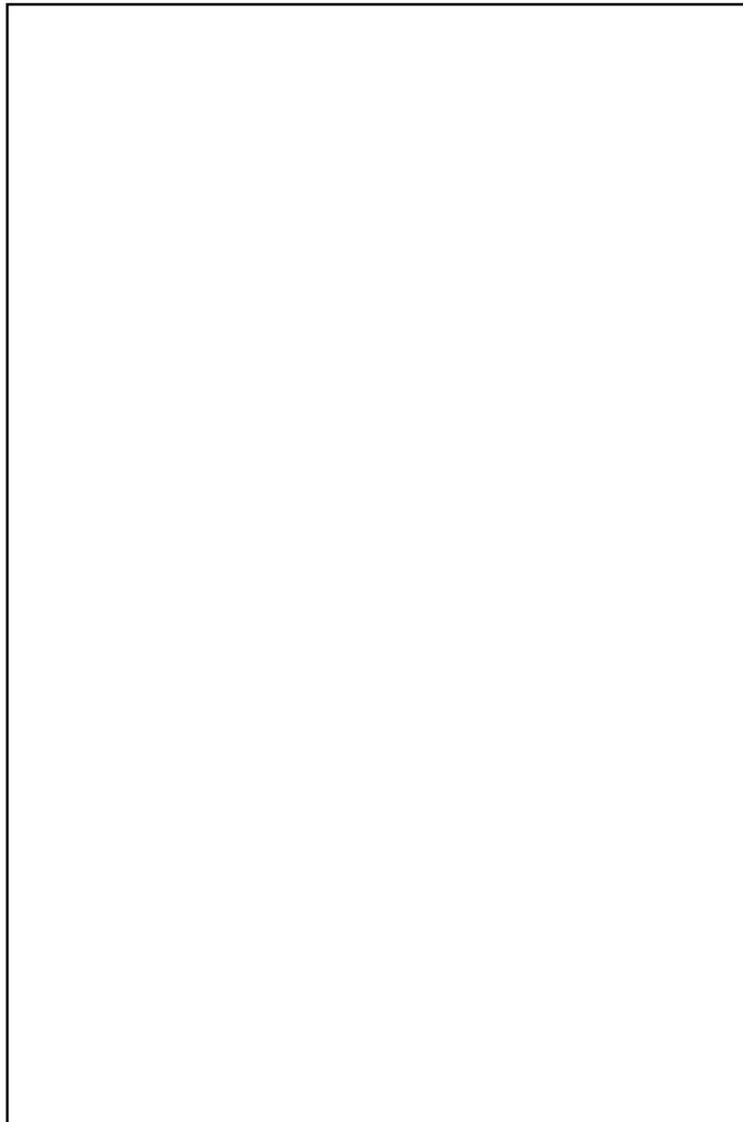


Plate F.9. Urban primaries face a very different set of constraints in the planning and design of changes to their grounds. This school (like many in urban settings) struggled with ongoing window breakages and other difficulties from vandals. The original response by police and local authorities was to protect the windows with these cages (which did not seem to work). Efforts are being made to find ways of improving things in consultation with children and with the help of architects and landscape architects. The 'cage' stands synecdochically for the protectionist attitude adults take up when faced with threats to children's safety.

Romantic Utopics

The utopics of romance cut across many of the other forms of utopics mentioned here. The central idea here is that children need not face up to the difficulties of adult life because they are children and being a child requires freedom from adult concerns about money, vandalism, danger, and politics. This form of utopics places children in a safe zone away from adult concerns but perhaps heavily supervised by adults. Another version of this form of utopics places children in a zone on their own to work out their own happy childhoods away from adult life but in this case the less supervision given the better. Any form of apprenticeship or political activism is absent from this except in the simulated safe environment created by an adult usually indoors. This spatial practice may inspire very little participation by children in changing school grounds beyond Hart's definition of tokenism but adults working with the essential view of the child that inspires this form of utopianism find plenty of 'good reasons' for excluding the child from the politics of change especially when faced with difficulties around safety, finance, or local politics. When children do get involved in activism beyond tokenism the results may confirm their views that children can 'do without this sort of thing':

Child: People smashed the windows and it took a lot of money to fix them.

Child 2: The benches were vandalised. 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.

In another school there had been threats made to the school and the children were given a police escort when they went out on a visit to their locality. The children were aware of some of the reasons why but felt that they could not discuss this with the teachers:

Child: We're not allowed down the pitch any more

Child: Cos of Dunblane.

I: So do you think that was a good decision?

Child: Yeah , to keep us safe [about half the children agree , half disagree]

Child: If we had 2 more janitors

I: So if you had more people looking after you you'd be safe out there?

Child: Yeah

I: Who know's what happened in Dunblane?

Child: A man killed 16 children and then killed himself

I: Do you think the adults are worried about children's safety a lot ?

Child: Yeah [2-3 others agree]

I: Are they too worried or is their worry just right?

Child: Too worried!

Children have now got well-informed opinions about much of the 'world of adults' through TV and the internet. We need to acknowledge children's real lives are already full of happy and sad moments in the same way as adults. The decision to only allow a restricted degree of 'safe or protected participation' by children in their educational environments may be prudent in the same way as those who allow children to surf the net suggest using software to filter their viewing but we can hardly ignore children's politically aware if not politically literate position in society these days. Through formal and informal learning, we have encouraged a form of education that encourages children to have lots of views on things but few opportunities for views that count except when it comes to our desires as adults to 'give them a happy childhood'.

Our Playground Charter: Our playground is a special place where we have the right to play in safety and be free to run about, share toys and games with our friends, care for other people and have fun. (From a school grounds report - large urban primary school)

Taken to its extreme we will encourage paranoia about the protection of children *from* dangers which may work against their participation in decision making, physical work and actions to combat vandalism etc. The utopics of romance encourages children's access to outdoor environments along the lines of a romantic view of a childhood driven, perhaps by how we 'remember' the childhood we ourselves had as adults or perhaps wished we had. My own work with children also precluded children from doing many of the activities they felt they could have done:

If you gave kids a bigger involvement in the choosing of materials or the actual way of building, you might get an even happier bunch of children than we are. (Child evaluating the 'Designing of the Seating Area Project, see Appendix C)

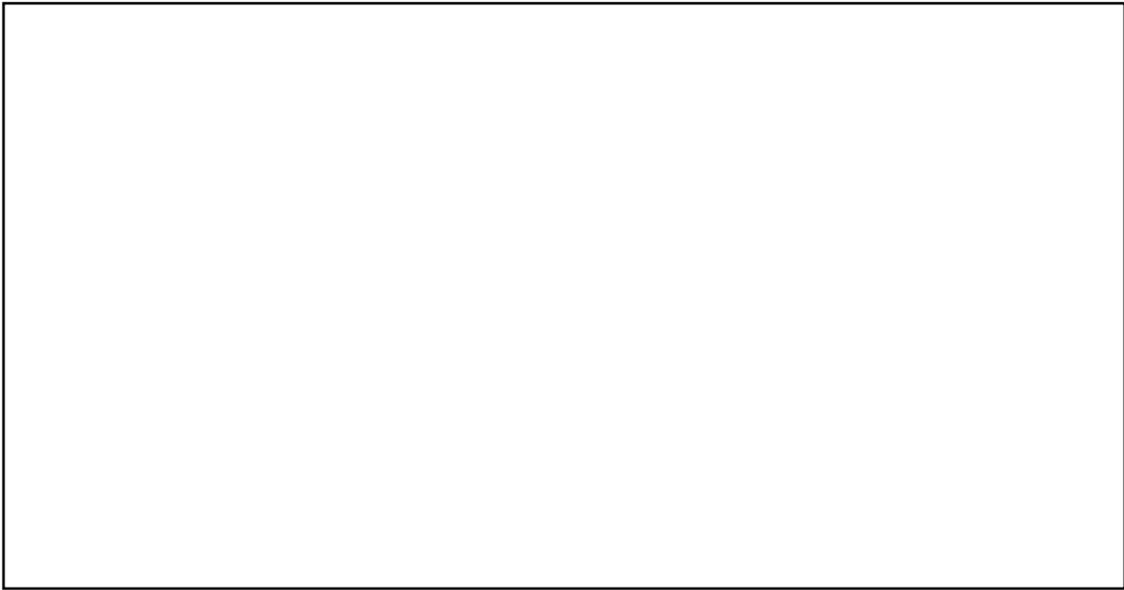


Plate F.10. Children are often precluded from work such as this. We may even exclude children from participating as ‘apprentices’ to adults. Here The Prince’s Trust Volunteers complete the Seating Area (Appendix C) but even with these teenagers the use of the electric drill is largely left to their supervisor. Plate F.11. (below): Children have reported enjoying their outdoor messy work the most. First aid gloves protect these children’s hands from the cement while they work through their breaktime to complete the pathway.



Communitarian Utopics

The common willing of a common world is an eminently practical undertaking, not in the least abstract. (Kemmis, 1990, p122)

Halloween, like other communal festivals, were once shared feasts where adults and children were all involved. Door-to-door 'guising' was once practised by adults too (and is still practised in Ireland on St Stephen's Day or Boxing Day). The fact that children are now the ones to be central in celebrating the feasts of Halloween and Christmas is indicative of something more sinister in commercialised western societies. We may be expecting children to carry our needs for communal celebrations like Halloween. Some authors have wondered if this is because we have relinquishing all things irrational to the cult of childhood: imagination, fantasy, empathy, spirituality, instinct, wonder (Davis and Edwards, 1998, p18) and allowed the commercial world to define our cultural practices for us. Where once these 'irrational' tendencies were once regarded as the domain of the feminine, now they are relinquished to the child. The 'child' is becoming the significant 'Other' that resides *within* developed world societies. But the attention being paid to children's spaces for play and social life is paralleled with the invasion of play spaces for adults in worklife (for example, through employers providing a gym in the workplace). In schools grounds changes we may be witnessing a similar attraction of the ludic for adults who wish to rekindle an association with the irrational and the imaginative. As adults we may be satisfying our needs for a space for the other-than-rational in our lives which, in turn, may be noticeable in our efforts to effect changes in school grounds. This kind of communitarian utopics that celebrates community through a celebration of childhood's special places may be having pay-off for the children involved or it may be demanding that children fulfil a role for community identification rather than any role as participants in community development outside of a tokenistic one. Similarly, the presence of thousands of children at the opening of Scotland's parliament (July 1st, 1999) is unlikely to herald in any significant developments in involving children in decision making through local or national democracy.

Community Development

Greene points out that a public space is always a project, never quite achieved but always coming into being. (Schutz, 1999, p83)

Child 1: When will it be finished?

Child 2: [Without despair] It'll never be finished!

Less easily evidenced is the movement to spatially define a utopic advancement of community life in school grounds development. By its very nature, community involvement is a locally distinct occurrence.

If encouraged to collaborate, they would learn to inhabit the place on the place's own terms better than any regulatory bureaucracy will ever accomplish. But this kind of collaborative citizenship is withheld from them by a combination of proceduralism and imperialism. (Kemmis, 1990, p127)

Could I firstly apologise for the inadvertent spraying [with weed killer] of your previous attempts [to plant trees and shrubs, and wildflowers] and assure you that we will do our best to make amends. (From a letter to a school from a local authority, Environmental Services division)

In some cases, as evidenced above, local authority practices can interfere with locals efforts to make changes. Head teachers may be approached by local parents or architects who wish to help out with a school grounds initiative or parental involvement may be encouraged by a teacher on the staff. Smaller schools have tended to be more active in encouraging outside help, seeing themselves as more bereft of resources and more communitarian in their outlook.

Plate F.12. (over, top): Children and adults work together to paint a dreary school shed.
Plate F.13. (over, bottom): While in this school a JCB was employed to dig out the pit for the pond, other schools have purposely refused such help because they wished the children to get more involved. In one nursery school the children used their toy wheelbarrows to move the soil with help from their parents over a weekend.

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Other times this form of spatialisation of the utopics of community is evidenced by the creation or restoration of a community space (community woodlands, community gardens) which is either within, peripheral to, or local to the school grounds. In smaller schools, the use of community labour with the help of children is not uncommon. Some communities of teachers, parents and others may spend many weekends and summer evenings enhancing their school grounds. In these cases the children's experience of change is founded on strong links between the significant adults in their lives. Their own involvement is then contextualised as a communitarian identity politics of place that creates strong ties between adults and children. Children will relate to their teachers in a different way in such cases and will discuss how they will visit their old teachers regularly long after they have left the school.

Child: The teachers are different at the weekend. (Primary school child, small rural school)

In contrast to the schools where teachers stay indoors and do not involve themselves in playground life there are significant differences in the cultures of adult-child relations. In schools of a large size or where there is no community-based initiative to work on school grounds, the children's comments about their teaching staff indicate a less collegial relationship. It seems that by making their 'presence felt' in trying to better the children's own territory through physical work and planning and design activities, that some teachers manage to reconfigure their status with children. The public outdoor play space of the school grounds allowed for a new context for adult-child relations in school environments. In Greene's words:

Community cannot be created simply through rational formulation or through edict. Like freedom, it has to be achieved by persons offered the *space* in which to discover what they recognise together and appreciate in common; they have to find ways to make intersubjective sense. Again, it ought to be a space infused by the imaginative awareness that enables those involved to imagine alternative possibilities for their own becoming and their group's becoming. Community is not a question of which social contracts are the most reasonable for individuals to enter. It is a question of what might contribute to the pursuit of shared goods: what ways of being together, of attaining mutuality, of reaching toward some common world. (Greene, 1995, p39, quoted in Goodman and Teele, 1998, p67, emphases added)

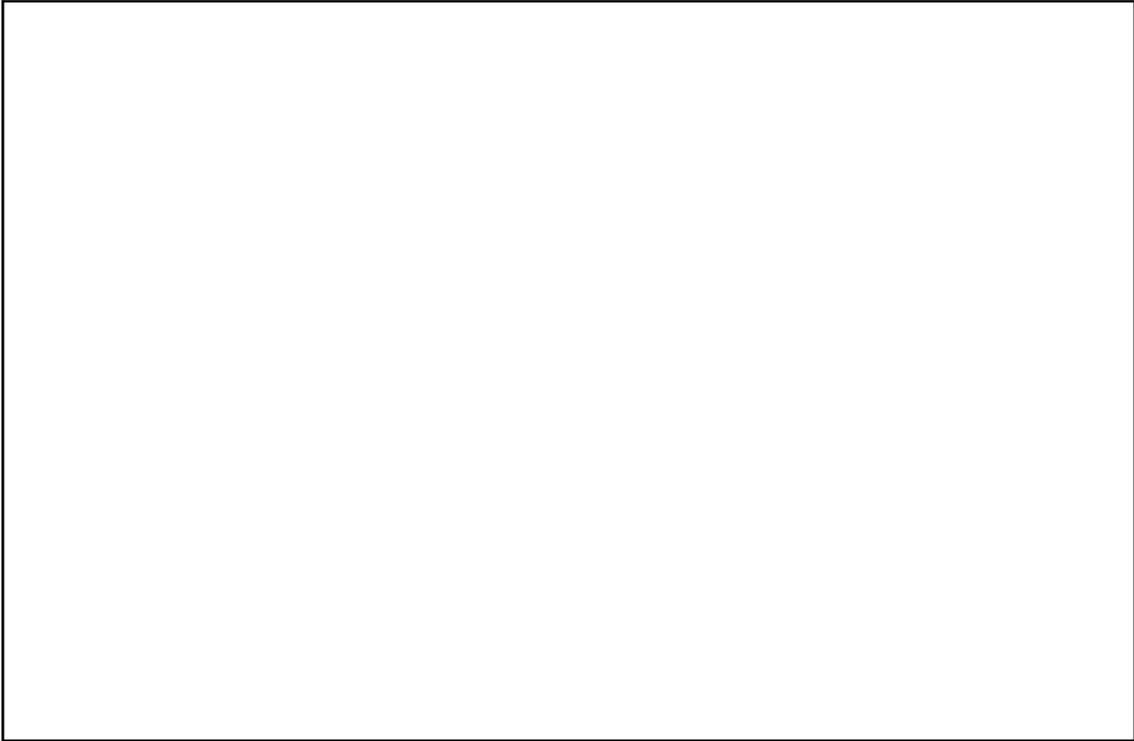
Perhaps school grounds can be thought of as a component of the child's 'real world' (Greene's word). In communitarian utopic practices, this 'real world' then becomes the 'open space' Greene speaks of so much in her writing on democracy in education. Schutz (1999) discusses Arendt and Green's work in asserting the importance of a common cultural world for teachers and children in an educational setting where local public action can have meaning. Freedom of the individual requires engagement in a common world. In their definition of a public selfhood individual freedom is found in shared common action towards common ends. Through participating in a common activity (like the development of school grounds) children may be finding their unique selves by Greene's understanding (Greene, 1988, p17). Greene's concept of the public democratic space (which is an idealised symbolic space - physical or imaginary, indoor or outdoor) allows for greater diversity and 'messiness' than Habermas' 'ideal speech situation' (see Schutz, 1998, p81).

No one can control the outcome of one's actions in a space filled with others who are unpredictable actors in their own right. All we can do is make promises that we may not be able to fulfil in a changing world, and forgive each other when our actions have tragic results. (Schutz, 1999, p81)

But encouraging participation in creating narratives about shared public space among teachers and children requires a certain kind of commitment to an emerging and uncertain self-within-community, especially, perhaps, on the part of the teacher. Greene wants teachers to bring their own local knowledge, worries, fears, hopes, concerns into the curriculum of the school. In my research I met with many teachers who attested to their own personal convictions about environmental issues, children's rights and so on as driving forces in their work to secure change in collaboration with children in the school grounds. One head teacher spoke of her personal commitment to recycling and how this became part of the everyday use of water in the toilets, the management of waste in composting and the creation of a diversity of habitats. Another teacher worries that if she gets too involved in school grounds changes she will fall into the 'trap' of making school her life with application forms for funding, and working on the site becoming an all absorbing activity after school time. Head teachers will attest to the fact that they often need to invest much of their personal time into initiatives in schools especially in smaller schools.

But things are changing: local authorities are now interested in attainment targets, early intervention programmes to encourage the 'raising of standards' and managerial approaches to education. These increased pressures on teachers can make the less easily assessed work in changing school grounds harder to find time for. Teachers have remarked that there were 'no league tables in the school grounds'. But despite the attractiveness of the work for some, finding time to create Green's 'open space' or Hanna Atendt's local public space (see Schutz, 1999) will be less easy for today's teachers who feel they are pressured into increasing amounts of paperwork and assessment procedures.

In that schools use the school grounds development process for a community-wide local initiative that involves children, we can say they are involved in a communitarian utopics. Participation by children in such work takes place alongside, or simultaneous the community work that is in train. In this we can find it difficult to sustain my ambiguous and somewhat artificial distinction between the utopics of citizenship from this form of educational practice within (or part of) community development. Similarly, for some, education for sustainability will be part of community development or neighbourhood regeneration. My purpose here is to make visible the possibility that education can become carried within a social praxis that has effects beyond the students individual learning needs to encompass community identity politics of ownership and control of local places. Of course this local activism can be seen by some as an essential part of a 'good education' but it is not traditionally seen as such. In one small rural school, the child's development through participation in school came to stand synechdochically for the community's hope for the future. With the threat of closure of one small school looming, the community's health and viability became linked to their desire to keep the school open and they worked together against local authority's attempts to close the school. While the political wrangle was going on, they worked hard to make changes to the school grounds over many weekends with locals coming in to put in flower beds, seating, and plants to encourage wildlife. A bird table was positioned so that at Christmas, the locals could use the same supports for to their community Christmas tree (Plates F.14 & F.15., over).



another Plate here (bird table (K'bck)

The willing band of adult helpers, so necessary when the curriculum puts such heavy demands on teachers, is readily on hand when needed. (Small rural primary school, not featured above), central Scotland; from a report of school grounds changes over three years)

Regular local gatherings took place in the school building at night. My conversation with one of the pupils in a small rural school shows how he has been 'initiated' into an understanding of individual contributions within the bigger picture of communitarian utopics:

I: Who made the changes?

Primary Seven Boy: Well the people from Kinbuck; well, everyone, because we raised the money for the plants

I: So, you feel this is your playground now?

Boy: Yeah

I: More than before?

Boy: Yeah. But there's somethin' wrong ... our school's goin' ta close down.

I: How do you feel about your school closing?

Boy: Sad.

...

I: And would you look at those parts of the playground and say that's the bit my Dad did bit?

Boy: Well, not really. I would say the whole thing is brilliant and everyone's put a lot of hard work into it.

The Utopics of Citizenship & Sustainability

Neighbourhood-based environmental action by children lends itself to thinking in terms of both small-scale realities and large-scale dreams (Community Development Foundation Briefing Paper No. 2 *Involving Children in Environmental Action*)

We cannot recreate the world of the frontier, even if we thought we wanted to. But there is something to be learned from the subtle but persistent process by which frontier families learned the politics of cooperation. They learned it the way almost anything worthwhile is learned - by practice. ... citizens do not become capable of democratic self-determination by accident. (Kemmis, 1990, p72)

Since 1991, (IUCN, UNEP & WWF, 1991) education for sustainability is understood to be a 'family' of concerns associated with human responsibility to care for nature (e.g. interdependence, biodiversity, inter-species equity) and responsibility to care for each other (e.g. basic human needs, inter-generational equity, human rights, democratic citizenship). Nixon et al. (1998) find education for sustainability as providing an emphasis on 'whole-school' change: on 'cross-curricular', 'permeation' and the importance of recognising the 'extra', 'hidden' and 'informal' aspects of the curriculum.

But in a secondary school context, the forward march of such an emphasis is found to be halted by a subject specialism culture that leaves little space for such cross-curricularity. This emphasis on subject specialism, reinforced by the increased public accountability demands placed upon teachers, has had serious implications for the role of the teacher: professional development and advancement are now seen predominantly in terms of particular subject specialisms; the subjects are themselves closely defined and allow less room for innovation within and creative linkage across the curriculum. Secondly, they write:

The second consideration is more allusive and seeks to order knowledge hierarchically. It is embedded in polarities which continue to structure the experience of schooling for both teachers and learners: academic *versus* pastoral, vocational *versus* academic, curriculum *versus* extra-curriculum, overt *versus* hidden curriculum. For *versus* read *school gate*: the physical and ideological boundary between professional and public interest. (Nixon et al., 1998)

Their analysis brings us to see how the intermediate space of the school grounds (within the school's gate but beyond the reach of most curricular implementation) can be providing a very formative identity-changing experience for schools who are moving (at primary level more than secondary it must be said) to change school cultures in ways that have impacts on the status and experience of the learner, the teacher and the way curricula are organised. For the learner, primary schools move towards seeing value in student initiated projects, helping students become active citizens, and helping students make links with the community and the wider world in schools grounds changes. For the teacher, there is a need to work collaboratively with other teachers, with locals and to see teaching as a 'discursive practice' (see Nixon et al., 1998); the utopics of community development are never far from the utopics of sustainability and citizenship.

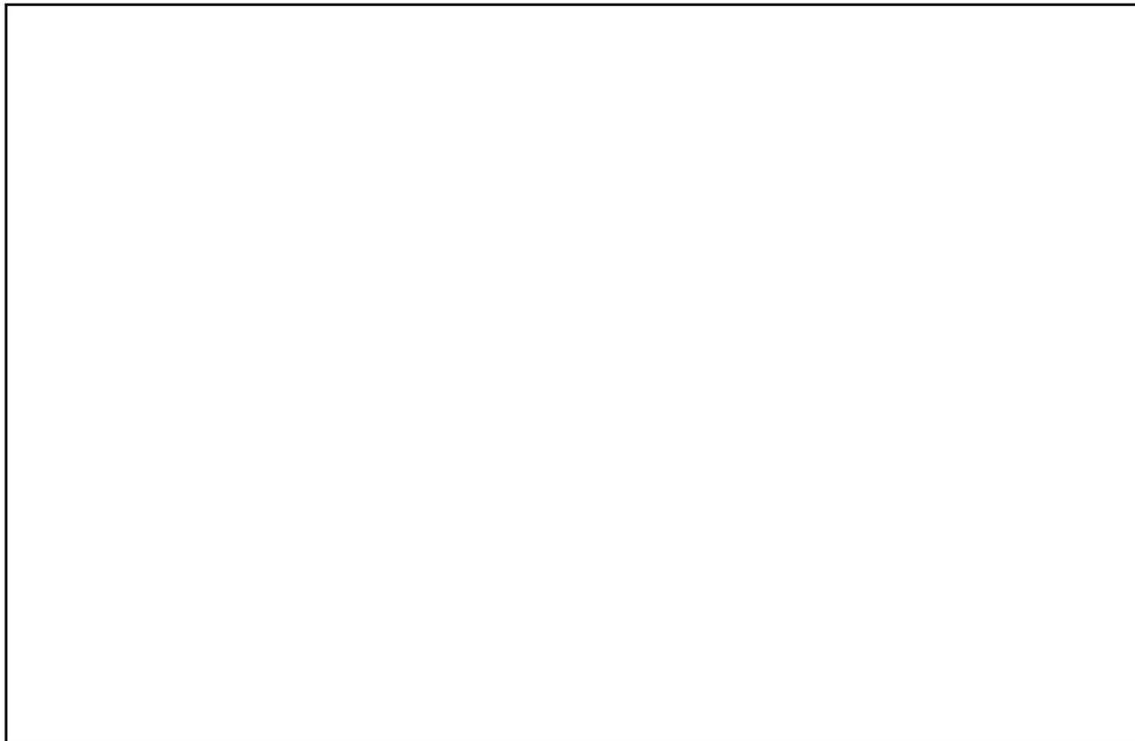


Plate. F. 16. A piece of 'waste ground' gets adopted by a secondary school. They clean up the site, take out the trees dying of Dutch Elm disease, and plant in native species to restore the habitat value. The clearance of the rubbish from the site took place over a summer holiday with voluntary labour from the young people. Their teacher's enthusiasm was seen by the young people I met as fairly crucial to their ongoing participation in maintaining the site. Other uses of the site by the teenagers (smoking, fighting) continue to get ignored or controlled.

In one school the children were involved in growing their own herbs in a herb garden. The selling of the herbs at a local fair by children is noted as something out of the ordinary, 'something special'. There are some quirky ironies at play here: in one part of the world children are taught to learn the 'ins and outs' of growing things; they learn about opportunities in the market, and buying and selling - and it is all regarded as 'curricular innovation' while, in other parts of the world, children's participation in work is seen by some in the west as an abuse (see a discussion of children and work in Chapters 12 & 14 and in Appendix H).

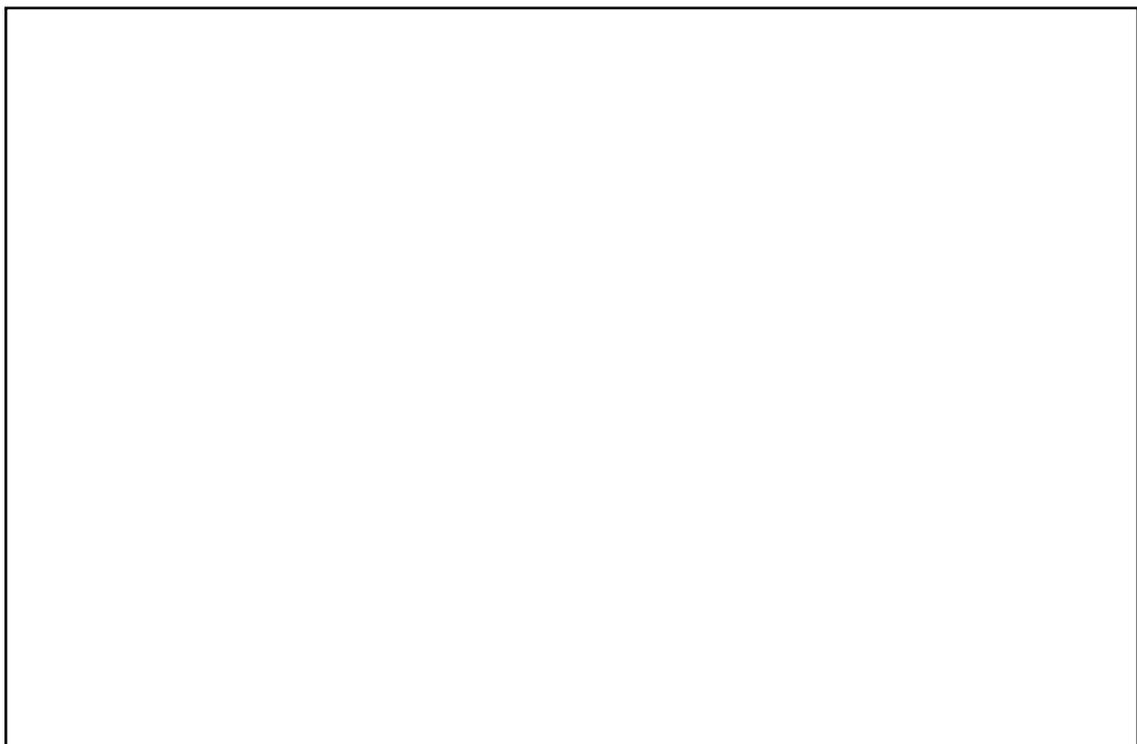


Plate F. 17. This herb garden project began as part of classroom-based topic work on Victorian life. During break times the children who were involved in maintaining the site would come and sit there to weed it and keep an eye on it.

The growing of herbs and their local sale by children is not a labour of necessity. It is better conceived of as part of a specifically western counter-cultural movement (often alongside the aim of advancing sustainable development) that takes many forms. Active responses to massified culture include everything from the revaluation of the hand-made, to the preference for combining alternative medical solutions to health problems, to the growing of vegetables in an organic way. For some these a whole gamut of personal lifestyle changes

are accepted and understood as inter-related. For others their personal responses may not be part of a thoughtful response to any need to live in a more 'sustainable' way.

Acknowledging our relatedness to the environment and the need to change our relationship with the natural world are central components for many new cultural movements. Other social movements also attempt to change how we relate to each other in the arenas of social justice and economics. The new social movement to change school grounds can be characterised as sharing some of these aims. So, while not everyone has a shared and agreed upon agenda that signifies a coherent response to issues of sustainability, we can look at how issues of the relationship between the social, environmental, and economic needs are in dialogue in many initiatives to change school grounds in locally specific, situated, and distinctive ways. Indeed, the confusion and argument as to what constitutes 'the' way of living sustainably is often discussed as being both it's forte and its weakness. School grounds changes can be often seen as a form of 'spatial practice', a spatial, physical, and cultural expression of a disparate and eclectic counter-cultural movement that seeks to reposition the individual in relationship with the environment, with each other, and with the wider community. This confused, yet interrelating matrix is an appropriate mirror of the interrelationships that exist in many discussions on the people-place problematic in farming, tourism, and development generally. There are no remarkable interests in the exotic, 'hippified' end of counter-cultural expressions, like earth-centred spirituality, homeopathic medicines, or feng shui, but there is an observable increase in the educative impacts of meditation and relaxation therapies. Despite this eclecticism, there are some striking commonalities and homogeneity of views among many who advocate changing school grounds in some way. Some notable interest groups have made their mark on many school sites through their advocacy, financial support or advice. They tend to share agreement on these things:

- 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 'landscape' and the environmental 'landscapes' are interdependent in creating cultures
- that our group and individual cultural identifications are linked to specific places as well as specific people
- that children in particular deserve a better environment in which to play, learn and be

protected and the children themselves can be participants in this change with others

These are four key features of the Scottish-wide movement to change school grounds when it takes the form of a utopics of citizenship and sustainability. They offer some frameworks for finding validity in characterising school grounds developments that involve children as such a ‘counter-cultural’ movement. Some initial thoughts are that school grounds developments often provide us with traces of a normative challenge to capitalism, the massification of produce, and the professionalisation of work as is the case in the example of herb gardening in the above example. Another head teacher wrote:

Will the primary pupils of [name deleted] today become the environmentalists of tomorrow? Where does [the school grounds committee] go from here? Hopefully towards the continued improvement of our grounds, the nurturing of positive attitudes to our environment and of that beyond our school and village - caring about the future. (From a report of school grounds changes in a small rural primary)

Centrally, there are many avenues for schools to find funding, advice, and all manner of support in order to enhance the natural habitat value of their sites. Local participation by volunteers, parents, etc is also encouraged. The holistic development of the grounds and the child is cited as central to many plans for change. Issues of sustainability are often explicitly high on the agenda; the interconnections between the social, environmental, and economic factors affecting school grounds changes are addressed together in grounds audits. The embrace of the multiple and connected issues of children’s play, bullying, habitat enhancement, school ethos, access for the disabled, children’s participation in planning, partnerships with local businesses, shows the way in which many schools have gone about addressing the school site as a nexus of social, economic and environmental problematics. The involvement and co-operation between adult volunteers, parents’ committees, children’s councils, wildlife experts, educational experts, and landscape architects, exposes the ways in which the three prongs of sustainability issues (economic, social and environmental) have been combined in schools’ responses to the perceived need to change their physical outdoor environment.

Central to the concept of sustainable development, which underlies Agenda 21 and the Habitat Agenda and on which education for sustainable development is founded, is the

importance of the younger generation in carrying concern and action on behalf of the environment forward into the future. School grounds developments sometimes demonstrate how some adults' own ethical concerns are used as starting points for trying to engage children in ways that build upon both adults' and children's own energies, hopes, and ideas. It presents a spatial utopics of sustainability that attempts to translate the rhetoric of sustainable development into a locally distinctive practice. One council-supported pack of guidelines for school grounds development claims as an overall aim: 'to encourage and promote the improved and sustainable development, management and use of Scotland's school grounds as a learning resource' (Dumfries and Galloway Education and Business Partnership, 1997). Another council assessed the schools applications for awards with reference to whether there was 'evidence to show how the environmental value of the school grounds, particularly with reference to native species of plant and/or animal, will be increased to provide a curricular resource for pupils (Fife Council, 1997).

Smith (1998) discusses the concept of 'ecological citizenship' as a new expansion of the concept of citizenship that grows to include the non-human elements in our society. In a revised politico-ethical stance the needs of future generations and the intrinsic value of other-than-human entities will be considered along with the more commonly accepted concerns of the active citizen. The result is that the boundary between responsibilities for and rights to public and private space gets dissolved. In a 'politics of obligation', responsibilities extend beyond the private lifeworld to include what are considered to be more public spaces. In many school grounds developments children get involved in evaluating their play spaces and grounds peripheral to the school. They are often involved in ways that get beyond tokenistic 'what if' experiments in deciding how to improve the quality of the place and enter into a praxis of local activism. Schools grounds initiatives also create the need for new relationships to be forged between local authority officials, planners and designers, researchers, like myself, and other voluntary environmental and parents' bodies, in their efforts to make changes to a school site.

The funding and support of school grounds initiatives is also driven by a strong environmental discourse. Scottish Natural Heritage support and fund 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. The trust, *Grounds for Learning* (the counterpart organisation to Learning through Landscapes, UK) is also part funded by grants from Scottish Natural Heritage and Scottish Environmental Education Council. These funding mechanisms, along with the many other organisations willing to support developments with a ‘green ethic’ (Volvo’s ‘Practical Environmental Project Awards’, The Woodland Grant Scheme, British Telecom’s ‘Countryside for All Grants/Awards’) and the many publications available to support initiatives of this kind, mean that schools with a ‘utopics of sustainability’ in mind will be more likely to secure funding.

Evidence of children’s extended ownership and responsibility towards the ‘environment’ and towards other species was visible to me on 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. Some schools had pets that needed ‘out of school care’ at the weekends; another child voluntarily picks up litter from her playground; a boy weeds a garden tub during his playtime without being asked; a girl initiates the provision of litter bins in the playground (Plate ?); children place logs and wood in order that the toads can get in and out of the pond safely and under cover.

Plate F.18. (over, top) This girl explains that she thinks this must be the most photographed bin in history because of the number of times she has been asked to stand in front of it. It had been her idea to install extra litter bins in the playground to deal with the litter.

Plate F.19. (over, below) The guinea pig is fed regularly and brought home by the children in a rota for weekends. Small rural schools can expect to leave animals like this outdoors in the playground without risk of theft or vandalism although some urban schools succeed in having animals in the playground too. Minding pets can provide opportunities for children to develop inter-species relationships and, in this case, was indicative of a school-wide ethic of care and attention being paid to the children’s impact on their environment.

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top

- girl and bin - bottom -

guinea pig enclosure

Along with Hetherington (1998) I identify this kind of activism as ‘identity politics’ which becomes spatially significant within the culture of maintenance and change of school grounds. With Bellah (1985) we can identify these activities as ‘practices of commitment’ or ‘second language of commitment’ as against our ‘first language of individualism’ (see Kemmis, 1990, pp75-78). Arendt sees the importance of a tangible, physical thing (*res*) to the practices of commitment in a public way. But the politics of separation and alienation can be difficult to overcome in urban settings:

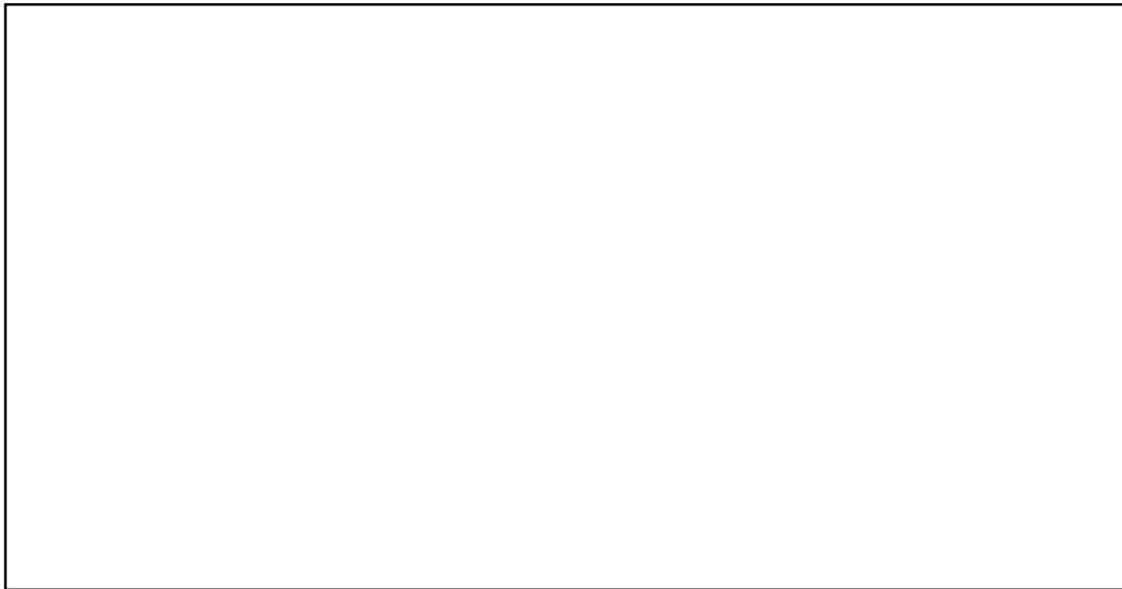


Plate F.20. Willow construction in the first phase of development. While the construction did last about six months, it did eventually succumb to the ‘heavy use’ it received if not to any intentional vandalism:

I'm not tryin to be cheeky or anythin but I really don't think that'll last the weekend. (Child on seeing the willow hut construction for the first time).

Barriers and Opportunities

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. Teachers need to be prepared to enter into the risky situation of ‘brokering’ between the school and the local community and local authority in devising ways of making plans real (Arendt’s *res*). As a result schools with more chance of being successful in their efforts to make changes are often the ones to get started. Small, rural schools are distinctively obvious in this respect: they have already ‘primed’ themselves with a ‘whole school’ approach to communication and curriculum delivery because of small school size; children recounted how they would revisit their teachers in small rural schools well into later life and discussed with me how they did not distinguish between adults and children in their thinking on schools grounds initiatives - they were in it together ‘like a family’ (girl in small rural school). Schools with mixed classes (including children of many different ages) are ‘primed’ because they already use and seek out ways of working in a cross-curricular fashion. The teachers in these schools are already ‘primed’ to advance into the utopics of sustainability and citizenship because they are already involved in their locales as civic leaders because of the centrality of the school to small rural communities. The community links are already in place. We might presume that a teacher, particularly a head teacher, in a small rural school, will engage in schools grounds development more easily than her/his counterpart in an urban setting for these reasons. My study of awards schemes shows that smaller rural schools apply more often for funding than their urban counterparts and that they are more successful in getting funding. Ironically, the schools that are more devoid of a local ‘natural’ environment and open green public space (whose tarmacadamed environments are seen to be in need of ‘ecological restoration’ by some) are the very ones that find too many barriers in their way to get going on their school grounds developments: lack of whole school culture, local poverty, vandalism, poor community-school links, pressure on school grounds space, lack of a locally concerned public about environmental issues.

In terms of the curriculum, we have seen examples of how schools rethink personal and social education, encourage more thematic and cross-curricular work, and use more fieldwork and outdoor opportunities for learning. ‘Successful schools’ are seen then to be making changes to the ‘whole school culture’ with whole school change re-orienting

professional interest and practice towards local community concerns and priorities within the discourses of global citizenship and concerns for nature and social justice. Small schools and rural schools are already well-placed to avail of their ‘primed’ culture in getting their schools grounds developments in place. Schools that actively engage in whole school change like this may not use the language of education for sustainability but proponents of this wide-reaching and inclusive nomenclature for education will like to name it as such.

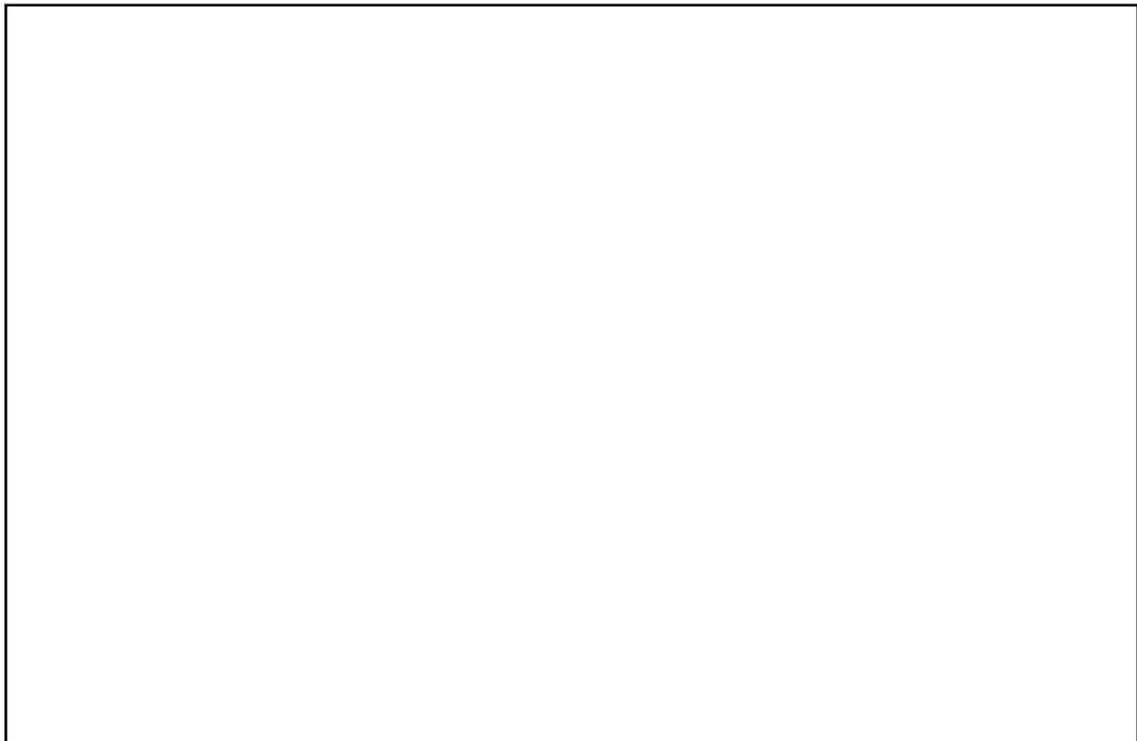


Plate F.21 (above) This school had a composting heap for its lunchtime waste and an arrangement for dividing their waste (including their bottles, etc from home) into collectable bins.

Plate F.22 (over, top) This urban primary took on a patch of ground that was peripheral to their school as a wildlife garden, pond area, and vegetable plot. They had a regular visit from a local parent to keep the gardening going and had a local landscape architect involved in the design work.

Plate F.23. (over, bottom) The ‘Eco School’ is a European award that is given only to schools that have a whole-school approach to environmental awareness (litter management, energy efficiency, conservation of resources etc). The first school to receive the award was a small rural school in the Scottish highland islands. The first mainland school to receive the award was a rural school with about 20 children on the roll.

blank
top pond area
bottom eco school flag

Environmental Education and the Utopics of Sustainability

If participation by children in schools grounds changes is compatible with any formulation of environmental education, it is likely to be ‘education for the environment’ (see Palmer, 19). A ‘socially critical’ approach to environmental education is advocated by Fien (1993). Here the emphasis is less on learning to know about something and more on learning in a problem-centred context. The focus is less on asking ‘What do I now know?’ and not so much even ‘What can I do?’ but ‘How can we become active citizens in constructing a sustainable future?’. From this ideological viewpoint students are involved in social action *for* the environment. This could include reflective participation in helping to design, improve, and maintain an environment, such as school grounds.

Symons (1996) similarly recognises three ‘biases’ in education for sustainability: our need for scientific knowledge; our need to be active citizens engaging in new practical activities (like recycling); and our need to engage contextually in inquiry-based forms of education. Symons’ triad of biases gives a more restricted version of sustainability than the four key features I offer above. They support Jickling’s view that education for sustainability may be too prescriptive for the evolution of open minded critical thinking necessary for a better future. Jickling (1992, 1999) does not want his ‘children to be educated for sustainable development’ because education should be about helping people to think for themselves and education ‘for’ something is not consistent with this; he also claims that critical ideas that threaten the status quo can get subsumed within the discourse of sustainability. In the context of this study, the ideas that get lost in the embrace of the totalising influence of education for sustainability may be the need to reconfigure the power relations between adults and children, and between schools and communities or the need to see learning as identity formation for teachers as much as pupils in local learning contexts. Specific debates and activism in these areas can get lost amid the taken-for-granted assumptions that lie within education for sustainability: that we actually know what we are educating ‘for’ and that we have some clue about how to get there. Children’s participation in the naming of what we need to educate for is noticeably absent from the literature and from decision making practices in schools.

The next conversation is included as a final comment and as an introduction to the next commentary on utopic place-identity politics. It shows how the utopics of sustainability (in

this case the installation of a flower bed with plants to encourage butterflies) can exclude the desires of other stakeholders to use the same place for a different purpose:

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.

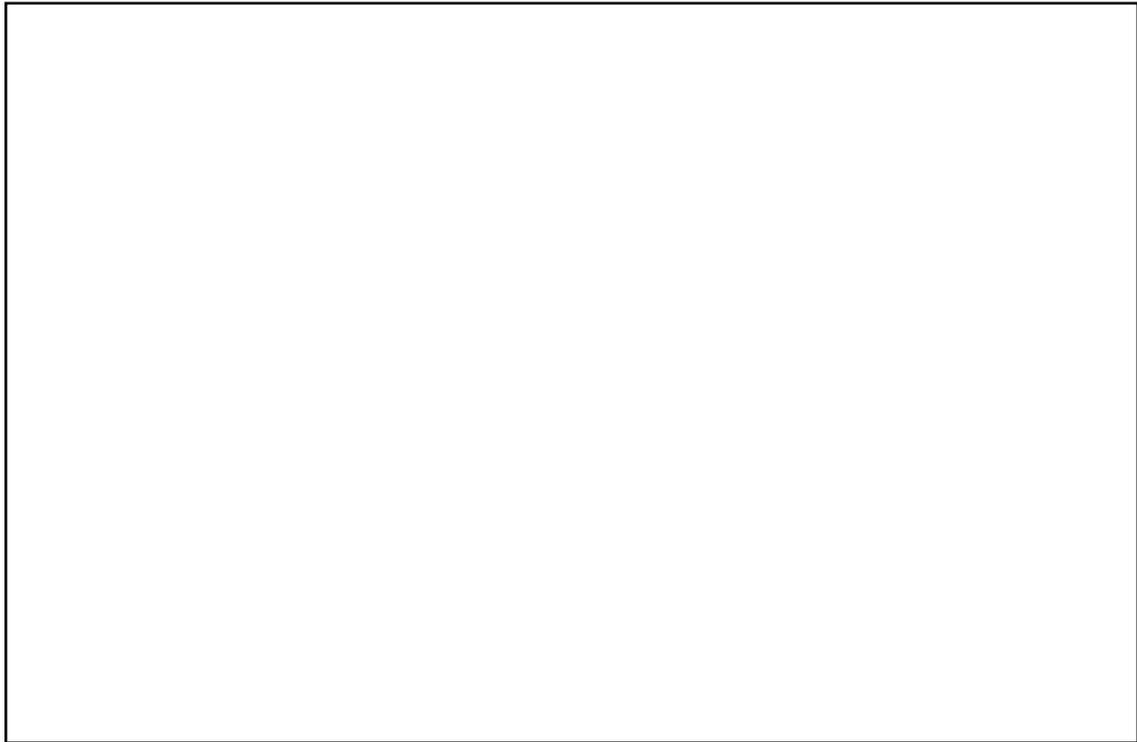


Plate F.24. Growing things in schools grounds gardens can be part of a whole school approach to learning about the sources of our food and about good nutrition and health. Set within an ethic about connecting people to a locale, gardening can provide opportunities for children to learn how they can contribute to local sustainability and grow food that they can eat or sell locally. Teachers still find it difficult to make a commitment to get out and about with children to do gardening with any regularity. Outside help and connections with local gardening groups can enhance curricular links with locals outside the school and can be a real opportunity to get children to meet with older adults in a transgenerational learning setting.

Utopics of the 'Tribal Child'

In support of the 'tribal child' thesis, Blatchford (1989) has found that children develop a distinctive and vibrant culture, separate from the school culture, that is not easily recognised by adults. A few component images of 'the tribal child' serve us here to undercut other essential views of the child. First we present the child as subversive player in contrast to the image of the child as 'no longer able to play'.

Children's 'Deficient' Play Theory

I have heard many comments from adults about how children 'don't know how to play any more' and that they have lost the 'art of socialisation'. Many teachers, head teachers and playground helpers will attest to supporting this thesis (from innumerable personal communications). The Opie's, speaking in 1969 came across the same thinking among adults then:

It seems to be presumed that children today (unlike those in the past) have few diversions of their own, that they are incapable of self-organisation, have become addicted to spectator amusements, and will languish if left to rely on their own resources. It is felt that the the enlightened adult is one who thinks up ideas for them, provides them with 'play materials' and devotes time to playing with them.

Pearce certainly saw this debate as having different currency in the late seventies:

How many times have we heard teachers and parents complain, 'All they want to do is *play*' ? A child's relentless absorption in play seems to be a problem for adults. Nearly everything we want to do with, and even for the child, seems to run against this formidable competitor. Play and *reality adjustment* are counterclaims on the child. His/her intent is to play with the world; whereas our intentions are to make him/her attend ideas of ours and work. (Pearce, 1977, p141)

Twenty years on, the same old story gets recycled, though now computers and television are named as the main culprits for children's failure to gain the ability to play.

Their idea of play now is to sit in front of the telly watching 'Home and Away' [a TV soap opera]. (Adult, communicating at seminar on school grounds)

By contrast, one story from a primary five girl shows the extent of variety and imagination

in their games as well as the use of a wheelchair ramp for a site of sociality and as a place for advancing physical prowess:

On Monday me, Lisa and Diane was playing 'My Grandfather's Shop' at the ramp. We called the shop a sweet shop. Then I got bored so we played 'Polo'. On Wednesday I watched the football. Then me and Tara and Sharon went to the ramp railings and did 'flips' backwards. Then we stood on the handle of the ramp. Later we gave each other 'piggybacks'. Tara and Sharon would not move so we carried them everywhere. Then we went to 'the bars' [fixed play equipment]. (Primary 5 girl)

Some photographs (over) from one school grounds show how children's use of a fairly 'barren' site is far from lacking in imagination. Plates F.26 & F.27. (over, top and bottom) show children using the peripheral bushes and 'out-of-bounds' trees as play spaces. The low bushes were a favourite haunt of a group of boys who had used the berries on the bushes to mark their hands as a sign of 'permission to enter' their 'den' or 'gang hut'.

Plate F.25. (below) These boys worked consistently over some four days to 'excavate' this stone out of the ground. On seeing this photograph, one teacher remarked that the children's play behaviour seemed very primitive, giving weight to the 'exotic native' idea of childhood cultures. Our response to play like this can be mixed, however. Some may feel that they had nothing to play with and that they needed to be given a better play environment, while another view is that children's own play initiatives are of greater importance to child development.



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Reviving Traditional Games

The playground helpers' role is one of supervising the play environment, though some involve themselves in teaching some games often inspired by the idea that the old games are being lost. Is it the case that we adults fail to see children's innovative play because we remember our own games best, some of which are now long gone; do we strive to relive our own childhoods in the lives of the children in our care? In fact, I have found that many 'old games' are still with us in our playgrounds but have become altered or adapted over the years: the multitude of varieties of tag, hide and seek, imaginary play and group activities still abound. With the many changes to school life over the last thirty years, like mixed schooling, and the cultural influences of TV and technology, the songs being sung are from 'Top of the Pops' and Tamagochis and Polly Pockets have become the centres of social engagement. Mostly, when asked, children will name 'hide and seek' and its many variations (like 'Wild Man Hunting') a very popular and much loved game. Song-singing is also 'surviving' in all the schools where I have had time to listen for them and collect them. In *Appendix B* I give evidence of other songs that may be indicative of children's own cultural transmission of identification options especially for girls. I cite a more fun-oriented play on sounds and 'body awareness':

Grandma, Grandma, sick in bed
Called for the doctor and the doctor said:
'Let's get the rhythm of the head. Ding! Dong! (sounds)
Let's get the rhythm of the hand. Clap! Clap! (of hands)
Let's get the rhythm of the feet. Stomp. Stomp. (of feet)
Let's get the rhythm of the haaasle. Haaasle!
Put them all together and what do you get?
Ding! Dong! Clap! Clap! Stomp. Stomp. Haaasle.
Put them all *backwards* and what do you get? ... etc...

Another girl wrote:

At playtime me and Amanda made up a song ... 'Cinderella, dressed in yellow,
came to town with a green umbrella, when she came back, she'd turned black
(P4G - suburban school)

Play as Identity Formation

Play may seem like a gratuitous act with little to do with self preservation. It is seemingly redundant. But this appearance may hide instinctual drives and complex psychological functions going on under the surface. We should not relegate play to the margins of what we value without acknowledging at least the possibility of play providing ‘serious’ potential for personal growth, change. Biologists argue that play may even account for the rise in the ability to survive among ‘higher order animals’ (like otters and dolphins). But many studies have uncovered other ways of looking at play and children’s culture other than from the perspective of play as ‘developmental progress’ (see Appendix G, chapter 5). I have already used the rhetoric of ‘play as the identity formation’ of self and of community to understand children and adults collaborative play, and the rhetoric of ‘play as active participation in political change’. These ‘rhetorics (Sutton-Smith, 1997) subvert developmental ideas of play in favour of giving more credit for agency and control to the ‘player’, in this case the child.

Play as Subversive Activism

What is also apparent from my findings are the discrepancies between how adults would stage, bind, and spatially organise children’s play versus how children would organise and name their playful actions themselves. Numerous children attested to the need to ‘break school rules’ during their playtime. Play undercuts the life of work by its upsurging presence in children’s culture. In a way, play deconstructs the formality of all other areas of the school day and can be seen as a subversive act. Some schools have decreased their break times in an effort to curtail playground problems and to increase the ‘working week’ (Blatchford, 1989). Many of my photographs expose children in out-of-bounds places on the playground. One group of nine year old girls returned regularly to the playground of their school in summer evenings by getting under the metal palisade fence through a small hole. They came back there to play because it was close to their home. Undoubtedly, the playground possessed different characteristics when uncrowded and unsupervised. Breaking rules and crossing boundaries is a common practice for most children in their navigation of a life bound by rules defined by adults. Like adults in work settings or driving a car, children negotiate rules, work with or around them and sometimes break them. This is not usually an unwitting act of an innocent and thoughtless child. Often the rule breakers are those that are considered very obedient by their teachers:

I have broke the school rules quite a lot of times like going over to the little one's playground to help smaller children out. (Primary 5 girl - suburban school)

Play as 'Anti-Work'

Culturally the teacher-pupil divide has been reinforced by norms about who goes where and even what clothing is appropriate. In the eighties teachers in Scotland 'won the right' to a break from dealing with the children in their care during recesses. Not to continue with playground supervision supported a view that teaching is seen as a formal activity to be performed indoors: instead of seeing it as a relinquishing of an opportunity it is conceived of as a release from a duty. The nature of the pressure and stress of teaching as a job made this view easy to subscribe to. The suitability of the clothing for indoor activities only as worn by most teachers daily also secures an image in children's eyes of an indoor education. Pupils will inevitably remark at any deviation from the norm in their teacher's dress 'code'. A teacher that arrives to school in trainers will often receive an amount of comments and will overhear whispers until the novelty wears off. In some schools, there are enforced rules for dress code for teachers as well as children. Because of the norms attached to what teaching is and where teaching is to occur break time is probably seen as less integral part of the place where learning takes place. The grounds are seen as a place extraneous to the needs of most teachers. Stories from the playground make their way into classrooms 'second-hand' or even 'third-hand' via playground helpers or children. The outside of the school building is viewed only from staff room windows and only usually when some 'misdemeanour' is in train. But as we have seen the movement to change school grounds redressed this spatial division for some teachers.

Bakhtin in the Playground - the liminal and the carnivalesque

The literary critic, Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) discusses the play forms of festivals and carnivals as a form of grotesque usurping of the accepted order. Bakhtin's writings about Rabelais work reveal a possible interpretation of children's grotesque playful acts (playing tricks, nose picking, farting etc) as the hidden transcript of children's response to adult control. This interpretation of some rhymes, clowning, mimicking etc. as the children's inversion of a reality that is unsavoury to them is gaining prominence with some authors (Davis and Edwards, 1998). April Fool's jokes and making mischief generally may be interpreted this way. At Halloween children may expect to be successful in their demands for ransom from

their adult carers through trick or treating and practical jokes. At this time of year the celebration of an 'upside-down world' brings an opportunity for children to cross usually forbidden boundaries. Expressions of children's power to unsettle the adults' world of decorum and order indicate that the rest of the year is about maintaining a balance of repression of the same power that children know they could have all the time if things were different. Davis and Edwards (1998, p16) see the boundary between the adult and child worlds as an even more significant rubric for understanding Halloween than any attention paid to the boundary between the real and the surreal, the living and the dead, boundaries more commonly associated with this time of year. Halloween tells children that childhood is a social construct.

The festive features of the playground noted by Sutton-Smith (1990) hold true from my experiences of break time with many ritual and grotesque elements. Bakhtin analysed the work of Rabelais, a Russian writer, in a way that showed how ecclesiastical, classical high culture was set against the more profane by his attention to humorous forms of folk culture. A Bakhtinian analysis of the playground would include the carnivalesque elements of popular folk lives of children in the playground:

- ritual spectacles (soccer and playing on the bars),
- comic verbal compositions (songs, rhymes for picking teams etc) and
- various genres of 'billingsgate' (curses, oaths, popular blazons) (See Vice, 1997, pp151-152). Children who can't accept that they are 'on' in games of tig etc sometimes get shouted at: e.g. He can't take it! He can't take it! (Primary school boy, aged 10)

I have witnessed and heard of many details of grotesque realism reminiscent of the carnival. These included the bumping of heads, the detailed analysis of pools of blood by a group of boys, the wearing of masks at Halloween. One report was of a girl who supposedly stripped in front of some boys at the bottom of the playing field. This area, known as 'the gang huts' was the site of many carnivalesque and grotesque acts:

P7G: People go to the toilet down there... and people were killing nature.

I: You mean they were breaking branches off the trees? [I knew this already]

P7G: Yes, and they were making weapons out of them.

I: And would you attack each other's gang huts?

P7G: Yes, ... and there was a nest with baby birds ... and people were whacking them

off the trees and everythin' ... playing armies ... whacking each other ... there was a pigeon's nest ... people were throwing stones and tryin' to hit them.

I: What did people talk about down there?

P7G: Well, ... really good films like Hocus Pocus .. girl's sing songs from Hocus Pocus [a film].

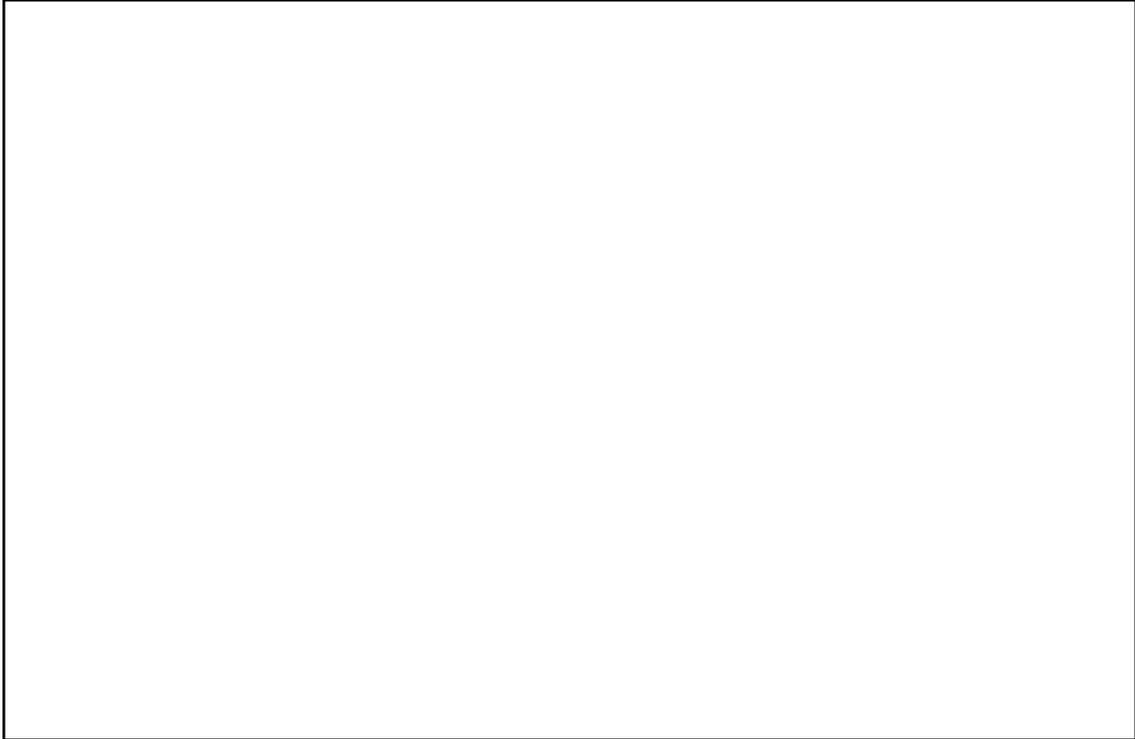


Plate F.28. The irrepressibly ludic in children's lifeworlds.

Once the head teacher found out about all this they were ‘banned’ from use of the area on the grounds that ‘some children were getting hurt’ according to the children. Perhaps the activity of the gang huts with the raiding of each others spaces for artifacts like sticks (highly sought after weapons) and soft furnishings (used as bouncy castles) provides the best material for a carnivalesque interpretation of playground life. It was carnivalesque in the Bakhtinian sense in that there was no obvious division between performers and spectators, there was a free and familiar contact between people allowing for mass activities, there were unusual combinations of the sacred and the profane, the lofty and the low, the wise and the stupid. The ‘gang huts’ was the site of many acts of the profane; there were debasings and bringings down to the level of the body, laughter directed at sacred objects, the parodying of almost everything. Inside the classroom was the classical high culture of the subjects being taught; outside was the grotesque realism of eating and excreting.(See Vice, 1997). At the farthest reaches of the playground were to be found the children’s subversive scripts. They were the sites of resistance to the controlling indoors of the school. They witnessed a ‘parodic inversion of natural and legal order’ (Taylor, 1995, p23). Taylor analyses of the work of some professional English artists who wrote out by hand a massive legal document of Pope Gregory the Ninth, known as ‘The Smithfield Decretals’. These scribes also placed many drawing of “tumblers, sword dancers, beggars, and charlatans’ (p19) in the margins. Like the marginalia of this text, the playground was also carnivalesque:

It is a world of street theatre, crowded with jugglers, stilt-walkers, musicians and wrestlers; a world of exotic animals, elephants, unicorns, a camel; of deer hunts and boar hunts; of dirty jokes, when a monk sprinkles a lord and a lady with urine instead of holy water or a miller catches his wife and a monk in flagrante delicto. Above all it is a topsy-turvy world, where animals mimic human actions, and humans and animals mingle forms; a world of metamorphosed grotesques, centaurs, mermaids and mermen, wild men, and monsters, and of preaching foxes and hunting rabbits. (Taylor, p23)

Not All Fun and Games

As we have seen, not all playground life is ‘play’ and what is seen as play may not be as innocent as many adults would like. Sometimes forms of ludic sociality erupt between ‘games’ to allow for moments of reflection, observation of animals or others, and chat.

When I go out to the playground I like to talk to my friend Ashley. But we do not

always do this. Sometimes we watch the birds. Sometimes we dance. But my favourite thing to do is to play imaginary games which we make up as we play it. In the playground we have a green box. In this box there are four skipping ropes, a pair of stilts, and a catch tail and sometimes we play with these. But whatever we do it's always fun. (Primary 2 boy)

The Child-Player as Scriptwriter

Hetherington finds that the “search for ‘authentic experiences’ and personal growth” is an indicator ingredient in the ‘structures of feeling’ of tribes. We can argue coherently that this is the case for children’s use of the spaces of school grounds. Play has its rules but one of the rules is that the rules can be made up “as we play”. Rule making that changes at any moment cuts across adults’ efforts to organise space cognitively or morally. In many ways, the irrepressibly playful child is a flaneur in his own street-scape. S/he is a reader of the playspace without ‘anything too definite’ in mind (See Frisby, 1994, p81). Sometimes children in the playground are mere strollers, sometimes detectives, sometimes the producers of complex texts of self production. Unlike the self of the indoor classroom where texts are often prescribed, the outdoor self is free to be her/ his own scriptwriter. The flaneurie of children’s activity in the playground (in-so-far-as it can be seen thus) places first-hand knowledge as primary, posits the learner-player-researcher as nomadic navigator choosing at unpredictable times to play, engage in chatting, observe others, reflect on experience.

Imaginary games are the speciality of younger children. Who is to say what ‘deeper work’ in the psyche such games enable without more in-depth analysis?

We play witches. Catherine is always the witch and Beth is the cat and everyone else is the ‘good people’. When they get caught they are always in the dungeon ... then I pretend that you get cut up and put into a soup pot and you get eaten up and only your bones are left and they eat all your meat. (Primary 2 girl)

Child Comrade in Play

Some children in another school took it upon themselves to act as ‘Problem Solvers’ for other children’s bullying experiences. They took me aside to tell me how their work was getting on. They told me how they had set themselves up as a group of ‘confidants’ who would arrange to meet children in secret in the library with the permission of the head

teacher. As their workload became heavier they renamed themselves: 'The Playground Friends' because they felt that listening might be the best role to play. they held confidential meetings with children who discussed prank phone calls and other bullying incidents that occurred during the play time. they arranged appointments, kept records, and gave up their break times to deal with their peers problems. Noticeably absent from the group were any boys. Neither did boys come and tell their stories to the group. The girls recognised that the boys had a lot to lose if they were 'found out' by the boys. In any event, they would miss out on the football if they came during break. The work of this group of girls shows that children are well able to self-organise for participation in school life, Their work went beyond the facilitation of the smooth running of the school to include an ethic of care for fellow pupils. they had plans to extend their work the following year.

Neither are all of children's games lacking in serious content. I recorded a children's drama enacted in the 'willow hut' which became their imaginary house. In order to get their roles defined better they asked me:

Child: What do you call a person who can call to your house and arrange to take your children away?

I: *A social worker?*

Child: Yeah, that's it!

The children enacted a series of playlets where the social worker visited to check if the 'Mum' and 'Dad' were caring for the child, brushing his teeth, or being hit by his parents. They told me they got their ideas for plays from class discussions, and TV soap operas like *Holly Oaks*, or *The Rug Rats*.

Playground as Marginal Space

So far we have invoked images of the tribal child as 'player', 'subversive activist', as 'constructor of complex peer cultures' within the spatial utopics of the school grounds. Reviewing playground life in this way invites a new perspective on children's participation in change. Their knowledge of the place is often completely ignored by adults wishing to make changes. What this perspective suggests is that we have opportunities for turning children's own knowledge which is seen as marginal into a new form of 'peripheral wisdom' (Wenger, 1998, p216). By seeing children's culture as neotribal we can validate the learning children engage in among themselves that is a form of social participation in

meaning formation and identity formation within and through place-identity politics. Seeing children's activities in the playground as already a form of rich, intricate, and developed participation can help us value children's views more. In accepting that adults need not necessarily 'know best' we can position adults *within* the learning community rather than outside providers of an education with the children as simply recipients of adult wisdom. School grounds changes are made at the peril of ignoring children's own views and the perpetuation of an 'us' and 'them' binarism:

Child: Yes they made one mistake. They shouldn't have put that football pitch in .. now we have to cross over through it.

I: So the boys have more room now than they used to have?

Child: Yeah, they do take over that bit and the toilets [newly constructed] has blocked the path for us.

Learning is not necessarily enlarged from a didactic imparting of knowledge by one group onto another. The viability of the concept of the 'tribal child' to narrate children's 'own experience' can be reciprocated by a concept of the 'tribal adult'. An understanding of adult and child cultures as tribal demands that both adults and children see themselves as 'newcomers' to each other's 'community of practice' (see Wenger, 1998). In these living-learning contexts, which are also identity forming contexts, communities will need to develop a shared 'identity of participation' to enable learning to occur. Information and skills will be learned *while* the participants enter into a process of becoming.

Viewed as an experience of identity, learning entails both a process and a place. It entails a process of transforming knowledge as well as a context in which to define an identity of participation. (Wenger, 1998, p215)

Generally, schooling is not designed to provide too many opportunities for this but instead provides a system of control that obliges the child to be obedient.

[at school] the child must attend to the culture's body of knowledge. If s/he cannot grasp its content and win applause, s/he will grasp its intention and loose to anxiety. Because what is offered is proclaimed true by parents and superiors, and because there is a system of reward and punishment for success or failure in it, the child has no choice except to fall in line. To refuse is to face abandonment by parents and society, to have no place left to turn to. (Pearce, 1977, p177)

In this way Pearce sees schooling as prematurely bringing on a split between ‘things’ and ‘their names’ through the introduction of the use of language, particularly in reading and writing at a very early age. This brings about an anxiety conditioning which preempts the later ‘natural’ split that coincides with the change from concrete operational stage to more abstract thinking. The ‘word-built’ world is imposed on young actors who would much rather be operating in a ‘real’ world where semantic logic is not necessary. These are adult worries. In the ludic reality of childhood secure in an operational mode of understanding, there is no distinction. Abstractions are realities and realities may as well be abstractions all affording opportunities for play.

The ability to play on the surface depends on the success of the work underneath, which depends on the success of the play. When play on the surface is finally destroyed and work on the surface becomes the aware self’s drive, the inner work of intelligence breaks down, and the synergy of the system collapses. Anxiety takes over, joy disappears, and the avoidance of death becomes the central issue in life. That is we grow up. (p171)

Plate F.29. (over, top) Children’s attraction to danger and to rule breaking may provide the opportunity for a spatial identity politics that is more essential than we might like to accept as adults whose job it is to care for children.

Plate F.30. (over, bottom) I discuss the intricacies of the social world of ‘the bars’ in Appendix E.

blank (replace)
top fence
bottom the bars

The Occasionalism of Place-Identity Politics for the 'Tribal Child'

I have already explored some of the viability of using Hetherington's work on new social movements to analyse children's 'own cultures'. I have found the tribal child narrative holds much in common with Hetherington's analysis of neotribes. The tribal child's story can be narrated using similar characteristics to describe the 'structure of feeling' associated with neotribes generally. Children's own cultures are heterogeneous in terms of gender (see Appendix E), age, social class etc but they do seem to share these aspects in common:

- 1. The search for 'authentic experiences' and personal growth.* (The child as scriptwriter of his / her own experiences; the child-player as identity performer)
- 2. Empathy with the rights and freedoms of others and interest in a shared ethnic identity as children.* (The child as comrade to the child in social life)
- 3. Emphasis on the need to find a distinct space for like minded associates to meet.* (The creation of children's 'own spaces' by children and adults ensures this)
- 4. The group is held together by their emotional and moral solidarity.* (Children are set apart in spaces for themselves)
- 5. The body is an expressive source of communication and identification.* (The body's role in identity formation, performance, and playful subversive activity)
- 6. Interest in knowledge not available in institutional settings.* (Children learn and exchange information about things they don't learn about at school: the intricacies of the narratives of the soap operas, films, children's ever-emerging sexualised identities)

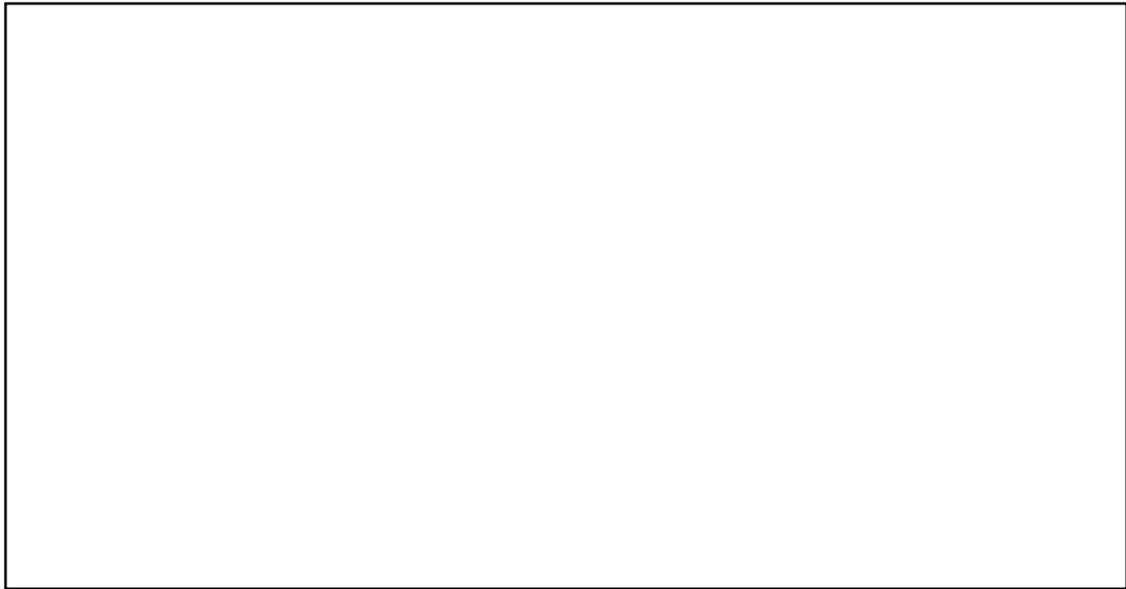


Plate F.31. (above) This happy duo were part of a larger group of primary seven children who used the back of the huts (which was largely out of view) in the school grounds for a game called 'Truth or Dare'. Should the child (the boy in this case) fail to answer the question correctly they were under obligation to face a dare - he was obliged to pick one of 'a kiss', 'a cuddle', or 'a torture'. He picked the 'cuddle'!

Plate F.32. (over, top) These children used the willow hut to enact a fictional drama about homelife. In order to get their drama up and running they asked me for the proper name for the 'person who can come into your house and take the children away'.

Plate F.33. (over, below) These girls showed me a place they set aside for chatting in a quiet place away from the greater part of the playground action.

blank (not replace)
top girls in willow hut
bottom girls in quiet place

As adults, it may not be as impossible as we might think to dip into the child's world. The attention being paid to children's spaces of play is a reflection, perhaps, of an adult desire to return to the playful side of life. The ludic turn is a reappropriation of child-only spaces to include the 'adult-player. If Piaget is erroneous in thinking that we leave operational thinking behind in the move to abstract relations, then we can recover child perspectives in our consciousness which can help us understand children better. Play continues into adulthood and is actively encouraged in some 'progressive' work settings. There are many adults in our lives that work at being 'child-like' and 'play-ful' in their interactions with others. In some academic writing, the central rebuttal of anything smacking of postmodernity is that it holds nor sense of hope or direction except mindless 'play'. From a serious 'adultist' perspective this may be the case. But from within a perspective that espouses the benefits of finding all tasks to have playful components, the potentialities of human endeavour are, perhaps, yet to be unleashed. Maria Montessori called for a recognition of the child as the forgotten citizen in *The Secret of Childhood* (1936). She asks us to form a new relationship with the child. The remedy is not to learn something new intellectually (as Piaget suggest we irrevocably do) or that we attempt to complete our deficient adult culture in these matters. Rather, the suggestion is that we should find a new starting point for a different relationship where the shared aspects of adult and child cultures become the arena for negotiation. This cultural activity will undoubtedly have aspects that are spatial and personal, dimensions that are political and contested.