REPLAY RESEARCH - ENCOURAGING THE PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN CHANGING THEIR LOCAL PLAY PARKS

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SECTION A
INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT SETTING

1. AIMS

The *Replay Project* aims to:

◇ **provide evidence (using interviews and photographs) of how a group of children with a range of different disabilities experience public play areas**

◇ **identify the barriers (if any) the children and their carers experience when using public play areas**

◇ **encourage and listen to the self-advocacy of the children through research methods and the dissemination process**

◇ **encourage and listen to advocacy for the children coming from carers, befrienders, and other key informants**

◇ **providing different forums for communication (between users, designers and manufacturers, Children's Services of Stirling Council, and befrienders and care-givers, etc)**

◇ **provide specific and practical 'signposts' for future design features / play structures / site contexts as outcomes of the research**

◇ **prompt some further rethinking of public play for children with disabilities through the research as a whole**

Plate G.1. Negotiating a rope bridge

Plate G.2.   Time on a trampoline

1.1. Motivation

The *Replay Research* project grew out of a desire by Stirling Council's *Play and Out of School Care Services* to assess their public play parks from the point of view of children with disabilities. The research was enabled by a collaborative approach to service provision in Education Services in Stirling Council who have been one of the few local authorities to adopt an integrated approach to education, out-of-school care and play. The Council works in partnership with *Playplus,* an organisation that is core funded by Stirling Council to support initiatives designed to increase access for children and young people with disabilities to play and leisure opportunities. Funding for this research project came from the Council and two companies: one is a play area design and installation company and the other is a playground equipment manufacturer.

1.2. Intentions

A general direction was given to the research by the drive for a practical, pragmatic outcome: **that public play provision for children with disabilities could be enhanced by making changes to the design practices of equipment manufacturing, play park design and location through encouraging the primary users (the children and their carers) to be advocates for change.** This direction was reinforced by the desires of the Council to give 'value for money' to the sponsors of the research who were the manufacturers and designers of play park equipment.

2. INTRODUCING CONTEXTS

2.1. Beginnings

The project as described above grew out of a meeting between myself (the student researcher and main author of this text) and Ms Sue Gutteridge from Stirling Council who worked in *Play and Out of School Care*. The meeting took place because a colleague in the university mentioned that we might have some shared interests and that there was the possibility of some collaborative research on children's use of outdoor areas. The opportunity turned out to be a fruitful one for my 'fieldwork' aspects of the doctoral thesis which as a result received the title: *Children's Participation in Changing School Grounds and Public Play Areas in Scotland.*

2.2. Focus of the Research - 'Finding out' and being 'Found out'

A general direction was given to the focus of the research by the drive for a practical, pragmatic outcome: a clear appraisal of specific playground features from the perspectives of children with disabilities and their carers with the attendant hope that we could learn about what real changes could be made to play parks in the interest of these children. This direction was reinforced by the desires of the Council to give 'value for money' to the sponsors who were the manufacturers and designers of play park equipment. That said, the research steering group team acknowledged the need to look at the social, cultural, and political dimensions of the project which allowed me to reach beyond the narrower literature on play structures for the research. For the team, the research was about finding out where others (children, other researchers, parents etc) can lead us in the future of play park design in Stirlingshire; as with collaborative action research, multiple aims were present in the group. In the cyclic nature of research done in this way, 'we' are continually being 'caught out' and 'found out' as participants in the research. Our defective perspectives get exposed along the way. Only in this context can 'findings' and 'data' have meaning which in the end may seem very 'local' to readers from other environments. But the processual and emergent nature of knowledge was central to our position; the result has to be a report that is evocative (of reason, emotions, intuitions), ad-vocative (of any marginal voices), and multi-vocative (including adversarial positions and dialogue), and written in the 'present tense' rather than fixed in time historically.

2.3. Contexts for the Research
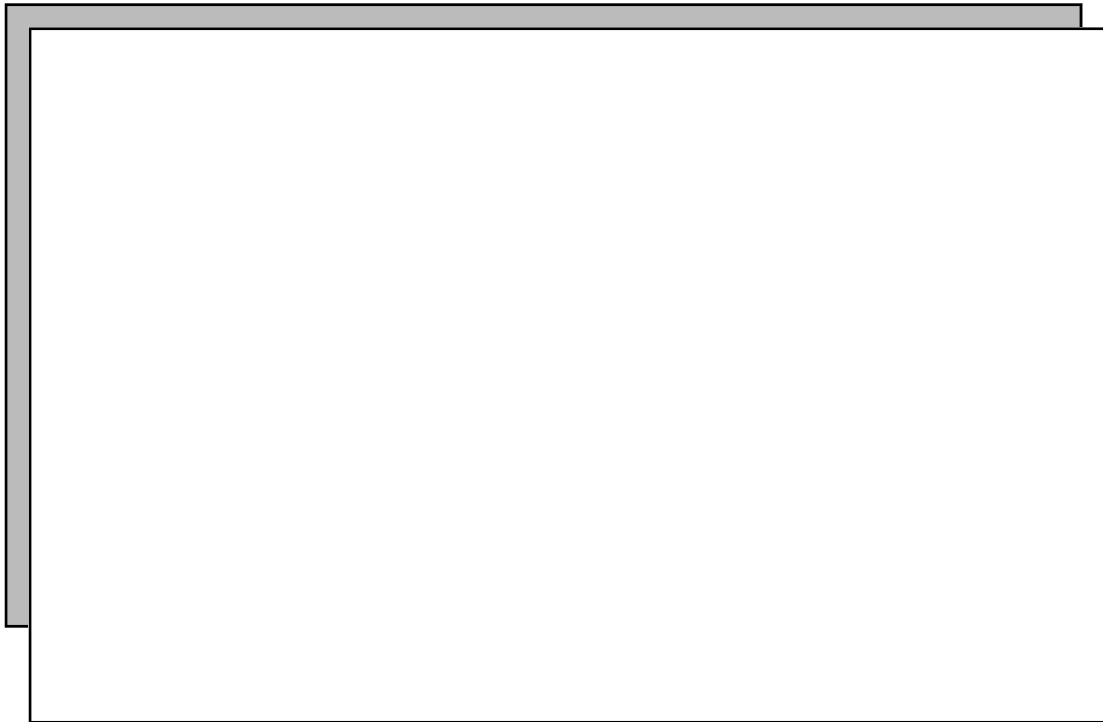
Plate G.3. Scotland Yard Adventure Playground, Edinburgh.

Children with disabilities are one 'user group' of the Council's services. Similarly, the children's experience of public play parks is only part of their experience of a multiplicity of other play, social, and leisure environments. It was in this light that the Council recognised that **"open access, unstaffed public play areas, are an important part of the spectrum of play provision for children and carers and ... we therefore need to find out if they are meeting the needs of children and young people with disabilities, and if they are not, how we can make them do so"** (Gutteridge, 1998). The research was stimulated by the comparison between supervised specialist areas for play for children with disabilities and 'mainstream' public play parks:

> There was a recognition that there are things that public play parks can't do but which are achievable within settings such as Scotland Yard Adventure Centre (SYAC) [a supervised play centre in Edinburgh with indoor and outdoor facilities specially designed for children with disabilities] (Stirling Council - meeting minutes: February, 1998)

Some of the factors that make a specialist play area such as SYAC attractive have been put down to:

- the presence of play workers acting as 'scaffolding' or 'bridging' on equipment

- the continuity of particular people in a particular place over a long time

- the variety of opportunities for use on a day-today, minute-by-minute basis enabled by the design of the site

- the opportunity for a slow considered approach to the changing of larger features

- the sense of ownership engendered by the participation of children and adults in making changes to the site and the idea that the place was exclusive to certain groups of regular users.

- a philosophy underlying the work of the centre as expressed in articles 12 and 31 of the UN convention on the rights of the Child.

- a supportive place for parents and carers

- a place that gives continuous witness to 'good practice' (Derived from meeting minutes: Stirling Council, February, 1998)

Plate G. 4. Scotland Yard Adventure Playground (SYAP), Edinburgh - sand and water play area.

The SYAP is a play area is part of a long tradition of adventure play area construction that began in Denmark in the 1940s with the work of C.Th.Sorensen who noticed that children got great enjoyment from playing on building sites. In London the tradition began in the

1960s (see Allen, 1968) with adventure play areas for children who would have nowhere to play except the street (Jago, 1971). These staffed sites usually comprise of a bounded, fenced area inside which was found a play building, assorted tools, junk, sand and water for children's use, areas for children to create their own buildings, space for arts and crafts, animals, and a wide variety of 'homemade' climbing and play structures. The rationale behind these playgrounds is that children need opportunities to manipulate the environment themselves. They can construct and reconstruct things out of wood, brick, clay or sand; they can cook outdoors, sit around bonfires and have adult-friends to support and oversee their projects. They can dress up and paint their faces. Choices are enhanced because of the range of materials and loose objects available; the role of the community and the play worker are seen as crucial to the success of these play areas. Play workers are encouraged to interfere as little as possible in children's play in these areas (Allen, 1968, p55) but Frost (1992) notes that play workers in London do now spend a lot of time building things while the children are at school. Perhaps this is indicative of a change in attitudes to play and the now prevalent attitude among many adults that children do not know how to play anymore. In the last ten years, inspired by the developmentalists understanding of play (see Sutton-Smith, 1997) some authors have advanced the idea that some children can benefit from varying amounts of support in their play. A continuum from *free discovery,* to *prompted discovery,* and *directed discovery* is suggested by Peters et al. (1985). Johnson et al.(1987) discuss *play tutoring.* Smilansky (1968) distinguish between *inside* and *outside intervention.* But most authors (see Frost, 1992, p340; Allen, 1968, pp55-58) suggest that the more non-didactic and facilitative a role that adults can take up, the better. The adventure playground tradition has much to teach us in the provision of play for children with disabilities but, as we will discover, they may not be as favoured a design solution as we would expect given the spatially disparate catchment areas that would potentially be expected to visit such a site should one be installed in Stirling. A better local solution will be to look at the many local play areas which, as we discovered, are regularly being visited by children with disabilities. These unstaffed play areas provide better scope and opportunity for children to with a wide variety of disabilities to find a local play space. Also, my research with children who regularly visited a local country park showed that children can access outdoor spaces in largely unsupervised settings and engage in many of the activities supported in adventure play settings. With this in mind we can reconsider the potential of the many thousands of acres of local play parks for providing safe yet unsupervised play opportunities that

incorporate some of the best features of the adventure playground: loose objects, sand and water play, soft landscaping, den and hut building and so on. Other reasons for opting for the unstaffed local option include: what would be regarded as a reasonable expectations for a local authority of the size of Stirlingshire, the culture of litigation among the general public when it comes to hazards, the recent developments in the planning and design of unsupervised playgrounds that allows for greater freedom and imagination in children's play, the views of children with disabilities themselves on what they think they would like (which is a central component of the research derived from the interviews and the visits to play parks with the children).

2.4. International Agreements

Next we refer to the current interest internationally there is for involving children in decision making in issues that effect them. These international agreements effect the practices of local authorities quite directly. Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child relates to freedom of expression assuring to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely and in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with age and maturity, while Article 31 refers to play recognising the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts. In the context of this research it is also worth mentioning Article 23 from the convention which refers especially to the provision of support for children with disabilities. It states that they should enjoy a full and decent life in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community (see UNICEF, UK, 1990). The following table outlines these three Articles and their influence on the context of the research internationally.

2.5. The UN Convention on the Rights of The Child

Article 12 **freedom of expression**

Article 31 **the right of the child to rest and leisure to engage in play and recreational activities**

Article 23 **support for children with disabilities.**

Aside from the UN Convention there are a number of factors which conspire to give a context for the research or this kind. Firstly, we may mention that 3% of children have some form of disability (Children in Scotland, 1998a).[2] After we recognise the significance of this number of children who are constituents of the public user-group of public play parks, we can note the following significant contexts for the research:

◇ The Local Authority Evaluating its Services: There is a growing awareness in public service organisations like local authorities of the need to create child-focussed structures and processes that have children as clients or have children in their care.There is a growing acceptance within the public sphere of the need to enable young people and families have a greater say in the policies and services that impact on their lives (Cohen, 1998).

◇ Children's Citizenship and Participation in Environmental Change: With increases in interest in ways of enabling greater participation in new forms of political participation comes the question of how we might organise and include children with disabilities in acts of consequential citizenship that impact on the environment.

◇ Controlling Spaces - Spaces that Control: Increases in interest in social theory about the reproduction of relations in space; space is seen not an empty vacuum but a contested place (see Giddens, 1991; Harvey, 1989; Soja, 1989).

◇ Children's Disability and the Built Environment: There are theories to support the notion that the way space is organised can adversely affect the way identity is formed for people with disabilities.

◇ The Debate on Inclusion or Exclusion: There have been many debates on whether services for children with disabilities (especially educational ones) should be provided in a special way in a place set-apart from the 'mainstream' or included therein.

◇ Cultural Influences Affecting Children's Use of the Outdoors: Research into the geography and sociology of childhood that foregrounds cultural influences affecting children's use of outdoor spaces.

◇ The Commercialisation of Play: Research is showing that there is an increase in opportunities for children generally to pay for play services in the commercial sector. The effects this may have on children with disabilities is under researched.

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[2] The authors do not know whether this figure includes children classified as having behavioural difficulties or learning difficulties.

In Chapter 4 ('Discussing Contexts - Exploring Alternatives') we take each of these contexts in turn to see how they might inform our thinking in advance of finding out more about this research project. Next, however, we look at some of the premises with which I[3] as main author worked as researcher.

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[3] 'I', the main author of this report is referenced by the same pronoun. When the word 'we' occurs in the text, I refer to what seemed to be the general feeling of the research group.

3. PRE-INSCRIPTIONS

This text attempts to make present a performative event for you, the reader. This text hopes, in following Denzin's (1997) outline of interpretive ethnography to be reflexively positioned in that the collaborative process that gives rise to this text has an outspoken emancipatory aim: the participation of children with disabilities in planning and design of public play parks. Some implications inherent in attempting this kind of work are foregrounded hereunder.

3.1. Different Voices

The text employs the consistent use of 'we' throughout. The 'I' of the author is implicated in the term 'we' for good reason. 'We' is used to denote different groups of people in the text: the research team, the reader and the author, adults in general, and so on. No one 'I' can find an essential expression in the text. This is partly because I, as 'chief author', do not accept the existence of an essential, unified 'self' either in myself, or in those I encountered in the course of the research. We can gather together Irigaray's 'We-you/I' (Game, 1991) in a dispersed authorship, reflecting the dispersed self (Tyler, 1986, p139).

The many collaborative elements that gives rise to the text can only be acknowledged in a diverse and fluid version of 'we' regardless of the named author above. None of what 'I' am to say could be said without the many 'others' that conspired to (re)construct my understanding of things. To take on board fully how 'other' is present in the text requires the use of 'we' which will be inscribed with meanings foreseen and unforeseen by readers. My 'I' invites a dialogical rather than monological reading by submerging 'self' into 'We'; the 'we' of the conversation, the discussion, the argument, the momentary agreement, the unifying and dissolving 'community', the evolving I-thou, and the conversation between those labelled as disabled and those as normal.

3.2. Representing Reality

Readers should be aware that we do not try to represent 'the real' experiences of children, merely our efforts to make their voices part of our own: an 'in-voked advocacy'. In other words: there can not be just one 'reading' of the document that follows. In yet other words: we cannot produce extra-local or extra-temporal abstractions about how playgrounds in general *should* be designed or about how children with disabilities (as a macro group)

experience them. For example, there are a 'findings' that will be of use to Stirling Council but may be an unsuitable recommendation for another place because of different demographics, climate or terrain. In the same way, the ethnographic aspects of the research method will not serve to authenticate a universal truth about disabilities, children, or play parks. Rather, the performative action of the text is to trace, with argument, the competing *regimes of* truth that inform and create these places, people, and events (see Britzman, 1995, p235). But this does not do away with the worthiness of the task of doing research with non-essentialist premises. The research has validity as an inquiry into the social processes that produce, reproduce and transform cultural constructs such as 'children's disabilities' or 'the accessible play park'. Instead of objectively assured findings that may be transferred to all situations, the research may offer an unfinished version of things, an invitation to refine (and redefine) questions that can be asked in other circumstances, and invitations to (re)view the scene from new positions. In the end decisions and judgments about how money is allocated and spent and about how designs are to be constructed need to be made in particular place and at particular times. We hope the text can be *useful* for this purpose for you the reader. 'Your findings', as such, are yet to be discovered by you, the reader.

3.3. The Importance of Place

We accept that 'place' is important: people and places interact in ways that makes their presence mutually codetermined. Places are always events in someone's experience. What we are centrally interested in as sources for the 'data' for the inquiry are rich events in places where the people are children with disabilities and the places are public play parks.
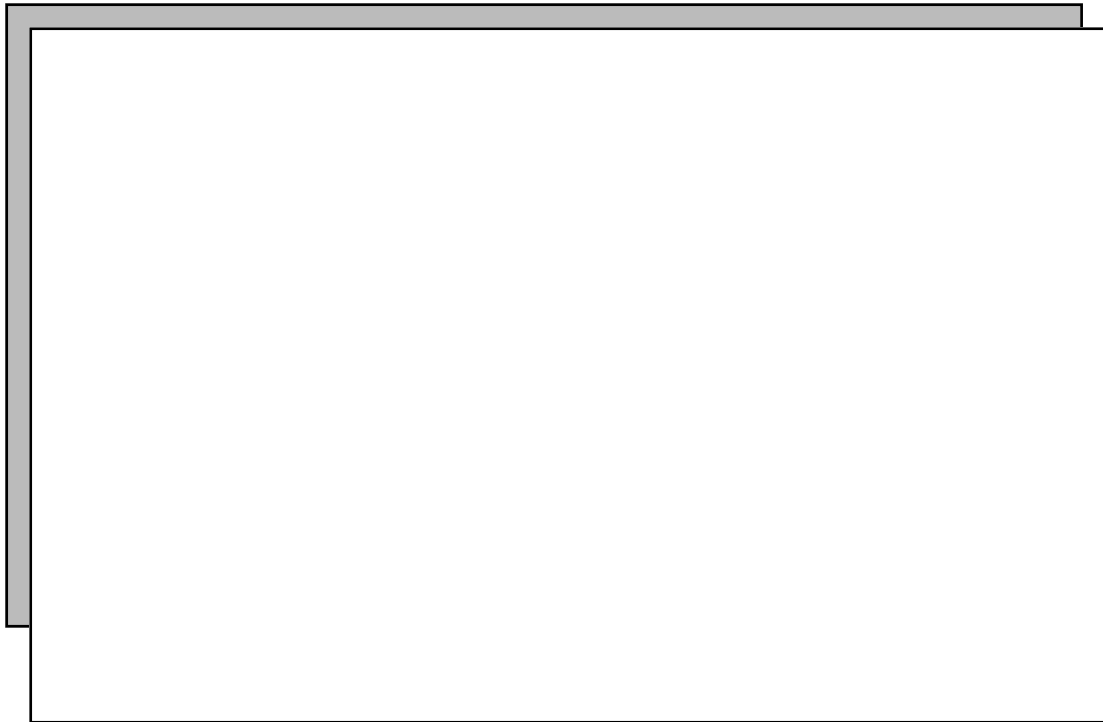
Plate G.5. The *Person-Place-Events* captured and framed by photographs are selected fictions frozen in time that represent only what the viewer sees.

In that the person-place-event is central to the inquiry, interview *settings* are as important as interview *transcripts.* Alexander (1979) writes about the process of design as an activity that sets places up for healthy life patterns to happen there. He argues that a pattern of events cannot be separated from the place in which it occurs (p79). So 'a porch' creates a pattern of 'Watching the world go by'. Playpark designs help enable certain patterns to occur (like sliding), patterns of play give structure the play park (like hide and seek); at the same time culture invents and gives rise to new patterns (like roller blading). We needed ways of accessing the 'person-place-events' where the relevant patterns of play could be analysed. This desire brought us to use photographs as a research method in guiding interviews. (See chapter 6). We also used photographic records of the interviewees playing in their back gardens and in their local play parks. These events are only available to us through interpretation. We aspired to do this as collectively as possible using interpretations which the children give through the use of the images, the comments from the siblings and their parents/carers, our interpretation as a research team and so on. The 'texts' available to us for interpretation spanned the visual and the written (for example the children's interview transcripts, the photographs taken of the children at play, policy documents, etc).

The position this research takes asserts that there is no definitive reality that is assuredly available to us outside of the positions we take up (consciously and unconsciously) in relation to the 'data' or narratives we encounter, which are always 'discourse-ridden' and ideologically determined. But we have agency in this within the cultures we create, recreate, or transform. By this understanding, this text involves a 'performative task' of my writing and your reading of it rather than a singular presentation of The Truth. But this does not invalidate the worthiness of such an academic enterprise. Performances (even discourse-ridden ones) can be catalytic in inspiring change. We accept that there is an inescapable political-personal angle on knowledge generation. Therefore, we attempt the generation of a local, contingent truth-to-be-contested. Such local knowledge can be potentially effective in strategically effecting political change; it is in this personal-political research action that we are engaged. As one who has never been disciplined by the label of 'handicapped' or categorised as 'disabled', perhaps there are no grounds for attempting anything but a humble piece of research that will educate me as much as inspire anyone else.

3.4. Interpretation of Experience

We accept that we can only vicariously experience the lives of others. This applies to those we involved as participants in the research. We include our own dis-ability in being able only spuriously to know others and ourselves. Instead we try to write an evocative text that may create a shared space from which new understandings can be forged. (See Denzin, 1997, pp53-71). By melding photographs and words in particular sequences and juxtapositions, we mix the 'oil and water' of images and text to brings out a 'plural sliding relationship between ear and eye and to leave room for the spectators to decide what they want to make out of a statement or a sequence of images' (Trinh, 1991, p206). Sometimes the mixture congeals or coagulates. There can be no 'scabbing over' of the wound of frustration which disabled people feel in the face of designs that create adversity.[4] A better text is a revelation of an unhealed wound that might show who and how damage was inflicted in the production of a 'self', disabled or otherwise.

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[4] My difficulty here (as main author) is with the need to acknowledge the frustrations that people with disabilities bear witness to without giving way to 'charity discourse' in the way I acknowledge it.

4. DISCUSSING CONTEXTS - EXPLORING ALTERNATIVES

4.1. The Local Authority Evaluating its Services

For local authorities, new approaches to service provision often involve greater openness and consultation, more devolved budgeting and decision making and the increased collaboration with user-groups. In practice, responses by state-sponsored bodies to the need to involve and listen to children and their families has varied in content and form. Not only are children being seen as users with opinions, they are also seen as potential planners, designers, and decision makers in their own right once given the right arenas for greater participation and citizenship. In the UK, Durham City Council's initiative, *Investing in Children,* profiles a similar approach to involving children in decision making. In Stirling Council the research was seen as an opportunity to meet "our general commitment to consult with children and young people and to engage with them in the planning and decision making processes about the various services that relate to them" (Principal Officer, Children's Services, personal communication). This commitment finds its genesis in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 (which grew out of the impetus provided by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1991) gives directives to Local Authorities to provide meaningful consultation with children and young people:

> [I]t is ... necessary for local authorities to take into account the views of users - and
> potential users - on existing services, their adequacy and quality and perceived gaps
> in provision ... [and] ... [t]he collection of user views and consultation present and
> perceived future needs should form an everyday part of service delivery (Vol. 1,
> Chap. 2.22 - 2.23).

This research takes the view that the child's right to be consulted extends beyond restrictive legal interpretations around how children's views should be considered in formal assessment and adoption procedures of social work departments to include a broader definition of what are considered 'things that affect the child' within education, leisure services, and housing. Similarly, a broader view of how 'age and maturity' gets defined will affect how participation is taken up in the process of the research. The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 puts forward the view that due regard to children's views should be given 'bearing in mind their age and maturity'. Children aged twelve and over are regarded as having such an age and maturity according to the Act. This is a limiting way of engaging in children's

participation in decision making which potentially restricts how a child's agency can be expressed. It can prevent children in general from having 'a say' if they are younger than twelve and can also exclude many 'children with disabilities' from participation regardless of their age because of their perceived lack of communication skills. The Children's Society (1994) sponsored a research initiative involving children aged three to eight in a pilot study of their views on safety, play, housing, and environment. They have found that children's perceptions of their local places was different from the researchers and that issues of how children structure language impinged on their research methodologies. Callaghan and Dennis (1998) found that adults concerned with the participation and consultation with children need to find ways of doing so which join with children's experiences of neighbourhood life rather than expecting them to fit uncomfortably into adult life.

The local authority's response to the Act (like the voluntary sector's) also acknowledges the need for a broad interpretation of its implications. They pinpoint children with disabilities as a top priority area in the implementation of the Act. While they welcome the Act's provisions for increased participation of both children and parents, they feel that these provisions need to be made meaningful through clearer practice. They acknowledge that specialist training would be required to allow children with disabilities to participate in decision making and that there is a particular concern about the lack of services for this group (Voluntary Sector Implementation Forum, 1998). Also, it will be important not to 'underestimate the time, effort, and resources needed to consult fully with children and families' (Children in Scotland, 1998b). Wheway and Millward (1997) write that 'it is proving difficult for enablers to ensure that children and young people continue their involvement after the initial consultation phase, during later fund raising, implementation, management and monitoring phases. We have found no examples as yet where the process of involvement could be said to have been comprehensive, integrated with adult led initiatives, or continuing' (Wheway and Millward, 1997, p4). There may be two main reasons for the lack of cases of sustained involvement on the part of children: partly, we can presume there are still many untried methods for involving children in more sustained ways, partly, we can also presume that children may not wish to be involved in the longer term aspects of some parts of initiatives that is better left to those who know more about it.

4.2. Children's Citizenship and Participation in Environmental Change

There is an increasing demand for a greater inclusion of all sectors of the community in decision making across Western democracies. Sometimes this move to a more active citizenship is encouraged only by the teaching of the nature *of* democracy while little is done in most institutional settings to ensure in practical ways that young people to have practical experiences of democracy *in action*. Few educational initiatives have as their goal the making of any culturally significant impacts on the local environment in any practical way. Children are viewed as 'prototype adults', or 'citizens-in-the-making' rather than citizens in their own right with rights and capabilities, regardless of their having reached voting age or not. With any demand for increased participation must come the recognition that children too can have agency and voice in new, more participative forms of local democracy (Hart, 1997; Henderson, 1997). Children's voices are perhaps some of the least outspoken and perhaps some of the least heard in the academic discourse on 'place'. In the planning of public places, children, like many marginalised adults, are some of the people Sime (1995) refers to who are left out of the design process:

Plate G.6. Children can be left out of the picture in the processes of planning and design. Here a child presents a model made as part of a participative project to design a school playground in a primary school in Glasgow.

One common thread running through each of the sections of this paper, entitled the

spirit, patterns, sense, psychology and politics of place, is the feeling that people
have been left out of the design process (Sime, 1995, p36).

The child's voice is often subsumed within a chorus of adult voices: architects and planners covet the design of buildings as their own; landscape architects specialise in the design of outdoor spaces. This professionalisation of how places (like houses, roads, and towns) get constructed has left the 'general public' out of the scene except for some examples of consultation. 'Home maker' gets reconstructed as 'client' who then gets removed from the arena of planning and design. Reasons for this include the rise in variety of materials available, legal requirements and standardisations put in place for people's own safety, and a commodification of person-environment relations in general through the professionalisation and specialisation of building, design, and the construction industries. It is worth noting that in an international context, this professionalisation is to be found mainly in 'developed' Western countries. The professionalisation and legalisation of the planning process has led to the introduction of a veritable minefield of planning regulations and laws regarding safety and standardisation. The idea of allowing children light their own fires and use hammers and nails to build huts and dens in adventure play areas is becoming less popular and more expensive to insure. Local work practices using more indigenous labour and materials get set aside in processes of globalisation. Governments and local authorities demand greater standardisation of space through planning laws. Parents concern for their children grows apace as statistical evidence supports the idea that soft surfaces and low-level equipment is best. Children are cosseted and further enclosed in cars and houses to protect them from dangerous adults. These influences resulted in the regulation and control of spaces for children which only allows for a specialised production of materials for children's play by specialist companies which are in turn installed by local authorities under strict regulation. The customary exclusion of children with disability from decision making processes at a local level is, therefore, posited within the larger experience of exclusion of the larger cultural group, children, who likewise form a subset of an excluded 'public'. Members of the 'lay' public face barriers to participation because of the specialisation of language and the exclusion of certain kinds of knowledge (Sibley, 1995, p122). One reading of this situation comes from a historical analysis of the construction of childhood which shows how children have been progressively excluded from lives of work and play that was closer

to the adult world in mediaeval times.[5] This process of exclusion has taken place largely through the institutional arrangements set in place to care for and educate children. The inspiration for the placing of children in institutions set-apart from adults comes from a view that childhood is a fixed period of life that is imbued with romantic notions of happiness, innocence and freedom from responsibility (Miller, 1996, p12). Yet in other countries children do, out of choice, mix work with schooling effectively. In the industrialised world, participation as citizens is limited these days due to children's relegation to lives of learning, leisure and play. Compounded with this are other reasons for the exclusion of children with disabilities specifically. Children with disabilities are excluded because of ideologies of intelligence, mobility, ability, and what constitutes the normal. There is a large gap between the abilities of children (as construed by adultist and "ableist" society) and the systems that are in place to allow younger citizens to participate in the creation of environments (Horelli, 1998).

Plate G.7. Primary five children (non-disabled) helping to design a hexagonal seating area in a Clackmannanshire school. The children worked with the author, some volunteers and two classes to decide on the project, survey the grounds, plan the area in more detail and be involved in the work aspects of the installation.

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[5] I refer here to the main text, Chapter 12 and Appendix H.

4.3. Controlling Spaces - Spaces that Control

A review of recent thinking on how space can influence and affect us provides us with new ways of conceiving of space. Non-Euclidean theories of space (Harvey, 1989; Soja, 1989) inform our thinking that space is socially produced and constructed. As an active constituent of social relations, space is socially produced to exclude disabled people in two main ways:

- spaces are currently organised to keep disabled people 'in their place';
- spaces are social texts that convey to disabled people that they are 'out of place' (Kitchin, 1998, pp343-4).

Plate G.8. Here a child, her befriender, and her brother get 'off-road' to do an environmental activity set in a country park organised by the Ranger service. She remembered this day as one of her favourite days out.

This analysis leads us to a point where we need to deconstruct the 'landscape of power and exclusion, and the geographies of domination and resistance' (p346). Sibley (1995, pp81-7) takes Foucault's development of Bentham's panopticon to look at how space is managed and controlled; but an important aspect of the panopticon is that we can exercise control over ourselves within that space. Sibley argues that groups like women, blacks, the old, and children are excluded by the ways in which dominant groups organise space. Normality is defined narrowly, placing minorities, such as gypsies, within controlled socio-spatial boundaries. The outsiders, the others, are seen as those that need to be located elsewhere. They are seen by some to defile or pollute spaces. And for some adults' perspectives,

children defile and pollute adult space (Sibley, 1995, p49) and so need to be relocated. For Hoy (1986) the focus for sociology is better placed using the question 'how?' rather than 'what?'. Thus: 'How is power implicated in identity formation through spatial relations?' not 'What is power or identity?' is our focus. We move here from the noun to the verb in research; from social entities like 'class' to the societal action of tribal *movements* (see Maffesoli, 1996). In the move to the verb, we include photographs as part of performative texts (Denzin, 1997): an image/text, or a place where history might 'split through the cracks' like Derrida's diffErance). Collaborative research and textual production would then become a site of dialectical tension, slippage, and transformation (Hoy, 1986, p83-107).

> Performance texts are messy; they exist in what Conquergood (1992) calls 'the borderlands' (p80), the spaces where rhetoric, performance, ethnography, and cultural studies come together (Conquergood, 1992, p80). (Denzin, 1997, quoting Conquergood, 1992).

In the context of a long history of children playing on the streets and on waste ground in cities. We can understand the play park as a response to adults' need to control children's carnivalesque eruptions onto the rationally organised places of production. In late capitalism these spaces might be the factory, or the motorway. The panopticon is Foucault's metaphor for a continuum of control that spans all social life; prisons and asylums form the most rigid presentation of control.

For children, the daytime space of the school is organised by time tabling and cultural norms that control how things happen in time and space. The school playground's celebratory atmosphere is perhaps the best witness to children's otherwise subordinated life. In the same way, the as-yet-unwritten history of public play spaces might reveal what the role of the public play space has been on children, their parents and carers over time. One view may be that the play park has been a response to the perceived need to normalise children's play behaviour outside of school times and to 'get the children off the streets' and into more supervised settings.
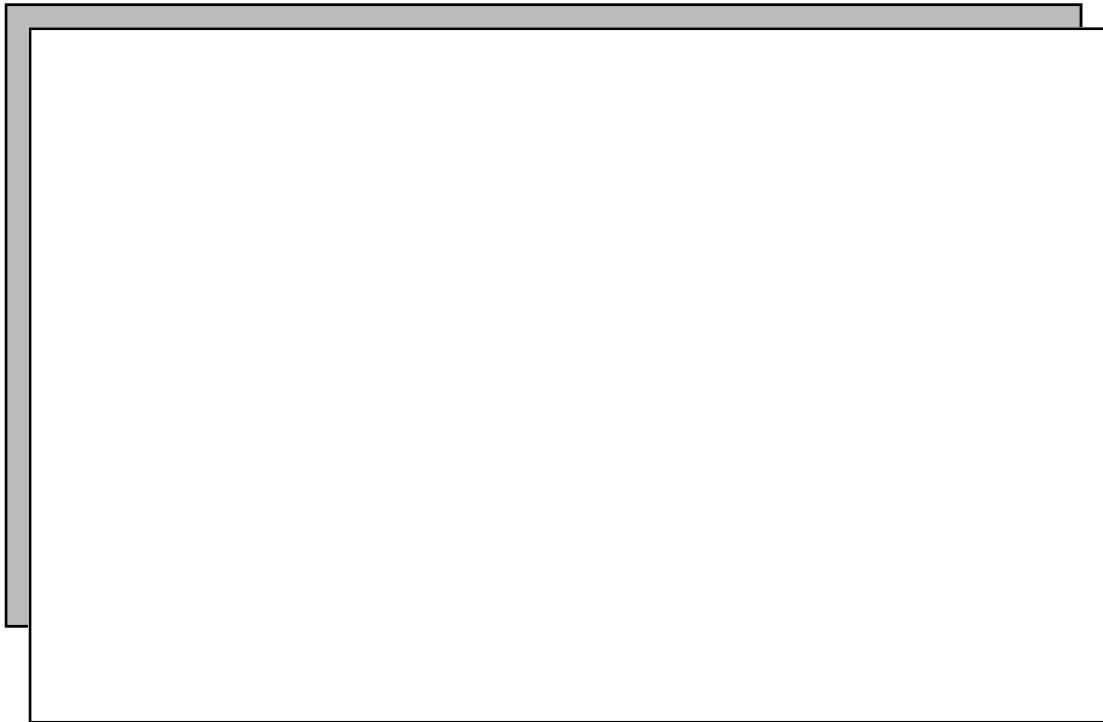
Plate G.9. Cameras are becoming an increasingly more common part of all public space. This is a recently built school (1990s) with outdoor camera for additional security. Many playground supervisors carry mobile communication phones now as well.

Play parks may be an unexamined and potent example of a carcereal aspect of city life as experienced by children. The process of incarceration may be one in which we may all be implicated to different degrees as either victims or captives (see Walzer, 1986, p60, and also Sibley, 1995, p83). Ward, (in Hughes, 1994) recalls how in the sixties cries of 'Free the children! Down with playgrounds!' were to be heard among academics. The similarity of the corral and the fenced play area advances the argument that we are incarcerating children *out of* public shared space. The demise of the mediaeval street with all its animals, vendors, children and adults is accepted as the necessary conquest of the street by the car; territory is gained every day by the advance of tarmac and fly-overs. Parents groups continue to fight for reduced speed limits and traffic calming measures. I discuss the plans to create 'home zones' in some Scandinavian countries (see page 134) as a way of regaining community ownership of the local street.

Allan, (1996) initiated a discussion of how a Foucauldian 'box of tools' could be used to analyse the construction of a 'self' in special needs education. Individualisation is problematised as a process of how discourses gain 'power over' another. For the purposes

of this piece of research, such a problematic individualisation is situated in a spatial context of the public play park and the rituals surrounding the events that occur there. How is a 'self' construed (spatialised) by the discourses found in planning and design of these play arenas? What experiences of being normalised (if any) do these children have as a result of the way their public play is experienced? How are new identities (re)negotiated despite the barriers met along the way? What 'scaffolding' (physical and socially supportive) is to be put in place to bring about desired changes?

An analysis of children's perceptions of risk will reveal how discourses operate to delineate difference. Risks are supposedly calculated for others in advance of the 'play-event' of play by manufacturers. Equipment has, at times, been designed to be used in certain ways. The design could predict distinct behavioural outcomes: slides are for sliding on, shelters are for sheltering under and so on. By these constructions, children are not seen as agents who might be able to calculate their own risk or assess danger. Risk calculations made by professional designers of the 'normal' and 'special' play park, respectively, may encapsulate notions of what counts as 'normal' and 'able-bodied'. How do children with disabilities experience risk and danger in these places? What perception of a normal body is to be found by them in the architecture of the climbing frame or the slide? Whose version of public play do they enact in their bodily performances? Will children have an experience of difference that is marginal to mainstream discourses of 'normality'?

Children's Disability and the Built Environment
The last decade of research on the barriers to access for people with disability has shown that disabled people's needs are poorly met in the planning and design of the built environment. Difficulties around access to the built environment has been shown to lead to feelings of estrangement, oppression and powerlessness (Imrie and Kumar, 1998). The context of this research was, initially, to explore the experiences children with disabilities have of their local play parks with a view to making future designs more inclusive of their needs. Rather than focussing on impairments as 'the problem', and hence buying into the medical model of disability it is considered more pragmatic to look at the social / environmental conditions as restrictive or uninviting and hence to use a broadly social model of disability. The Disability Discrimination Act (HMSO, 1996) has been criticised for utilising the former model to describe people with certain kinds and levels of impairment

while still creating "rights" for people with disabilities. These rights include the right not to be discriminated against in the provision of goods, facilities and services for anyone defined as a "disabled person". These are not universal rights, as various exemptions will apply (e.g. only certain degrees of impairment will qualify individual disabled people for rights where reasonable and certain types of organisations will be exempted from any legal obligations). The definition of a disabled person given in the Act is essentially a medical model in that it holds out as a premise the presence of a fundamental inferiority in the individual. The social model affirms that people with impairments are disabled by *society*. So, a person is disabled if she or he has a physical or mental impairment and if she or he is prevented from taking part in society by one or more of the following: lack of access to the built environment, lack of access to information, the imposition of negative or patronising images, reduced social contact. A person is disabled if their physical or mental differences are ignored. Hughes (1999) attempts to go beyond both the social and the impairment models of disability, arguing that the oppression of disabled people are oppressed by the visual culture of modernity where 'to see is to know'. Impairment is constructed, not discovered, through the non-disabled gaze that sees people with disabilities as strangers.

An Alternative Ocular Epistemology

Some questions the research hoped implicitly to answer were: In what way can we look again at play parks and see if they are infused with able-bodied / medical-model values?; How do children with disabilities negotiate such environments?; How are their identities implicated in the ways in which public play structures are set up?; What would their opinions be about how these structure might be different and can we see this from their point of view? Does the social model fail to acknowledge experiences of pain, frustration, and suffering felt 'in the bodies' of children with disabilities as a result of their 'difference'? An 'either-or' type question would give rise to asking: Will 'the problem' be located in the body or in the play park construction? Going along with Hughes (1999), we could hope to validate a different kind of gaze - the gaze on the disabled one as friend, colleague in research, participant in making changes. We can hope to use the photographs to disturb a purely modernist ocularcentrism (Hughes, 1999) and invite readers to 'look again' at things from the perspective and the gaze *of* the disabled one. So my epistemology continues to privilege vision but not the vision of modernity. Like Collins (1991) I hope for an 'outsider-within' perspective that invites empathy in readers / voyeurs. It is a

performance text (Denzin, 1989, p61). This text gains validity through an interpretation done by readers that includes an empathetic response.

The Inclusive Society

The Scottish Office discussion paper on special needs states:

> An inclusive society must ensure that the potential of each individual is fully developed through education and that their attainment and achievement are valued and respected ... an inclusive society and education system will therefore strive to ensure that it creates the range of approaches and opportunities to ensure that this is brought about (Scottish Office, 1998, p4).

Discourses about inclusion of children with special needs have traditionally tended to keep a firm focus on the educational system. There is, however, a recognition now that children's needs span the full breath of their life experience within institutions, in their families, and in their day-to-day experiences of being citizens (using public transport, shopping, and playing). Competitions between the ideologies of 'inclusion' and 'exclusion' have generally been played out at a theoretical level with a utopian belief in 'inclusion' generally holding sway. In practice, the experiences of parents and children has been less ideologically driven and more subject to market forces and pragmatic solutions. With regard to education, Corbett (1997) identified some aspects of the non-binary nature of the debate once choices are being made:

> ... inclusion and exclusion are so often presented as polar opposites, reflecting extremes of political differences. I suspect the reality is, as it usually proves to be, more of a messy series of compromises, adjustments and individual preferences. (Corbett, 1997, p55)

Corbett's 'reality' describes 'inclusion' as operating in a market economy where different people perceive and use services for different purposes. Some are strident exclusionists, some inclusionist for covert reasons. Simple, easily explicable, ideological positions are not the only driving forces. We suspected the same messy experience will be found in the narratives from the interviews. In the same way as there is an 'in-between-ness' to be found in terms of people's preference for an inclusionist or exclusionist approach to public play, the findings of this research will also show that an 'in-between' approach may be more

acceptable and advisable in the Stirlingshire context for a multitude of reasons, some to do with local constraints, some to do with ideological conviction.

4.4. Other Influences Affecting Children's Use of the Outdoors

Some commentators have seen play parks as just another urban setting wherein adults can satisfy adult needs for control over children's activities and use of space (Wood, 1977). Moore (1985) has noted that play parks may be under-utilised because of the nature of the equipment found there; it is fixed and predictable. Some commentators have noted that children spend small but regular amounts of time in play areas but spend more time in informal play settings (Moore, 1985; Coffin and Williams, 1989). The research may reveal if this experience is the same for the small number of respondents in the sample. Our instincts that children with disabilities seem to have a more organised and private life than other children and that play parks may be a more significant part of their play experience, were largely to be borne out.

There has also been a rise in parental fears for their children noted by many authors (Cahill, 1990). These fears are currently inspired by concerns about 'stranger dangers' which are also connected to other anxieties about the cultural constructions of 'childhood' (Valentine, 1996a, 1997). Parents also express fears that children may themselves be getting involved in violent acts, drug taking, drinking and underage sex (Valentine, 1996a, 1996b). We might presume that the perception of children with disabilities as a more vulnerable group might contribute to these fears being more manifest in parents and carers of children with disabilities. Regardless of the 'reality' behind these fears, they have an undoubted social effect. 'Stranger dangers' and fear of bullying may be forcing children into more supervised settings like play parks where they can be watched from a suitable vantage point. McKendrick et al. (1998, p3) note that the bounded nature of play areas was more important to parents than the safety of the play equipment itself. 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 still the greater 'real' risk. The enclosure of space found in the public play park is also inspired by fears of stereotypical (usually male) others: e.g. the paedophile, the aggressive teenager. Children with disabilities may experience play parks in different ways to the 'normal' experiences of children as described above. For children with disabilities, their parents, and carers, 'others to be watched out for' may sometimes be the 'able-bodied

stranger' too. Binary ideas of 'us-as-normal' and 'they-who-need watching' works both ways.

The Public Park and Play Area Stands Its Ground

McKendrick (1998) shows that despite the rapid expansion of commercial 'playspaces' for children (theme parks, zoos, indoor play areas), parks/playgrounds "remain the most frequented playspace" (p3). However, his statistical analysis puts parks and playgrounds together as one which, for our purposes, fails to give us a picture of how important play parks might be independently of larger 'parkland' area. Also, as Wheway and Millward (1997) have argued, the fact that these places get cited as the preferred place for play may not represent the children's actual practice of playing informally in may other outdoor incidental settings.
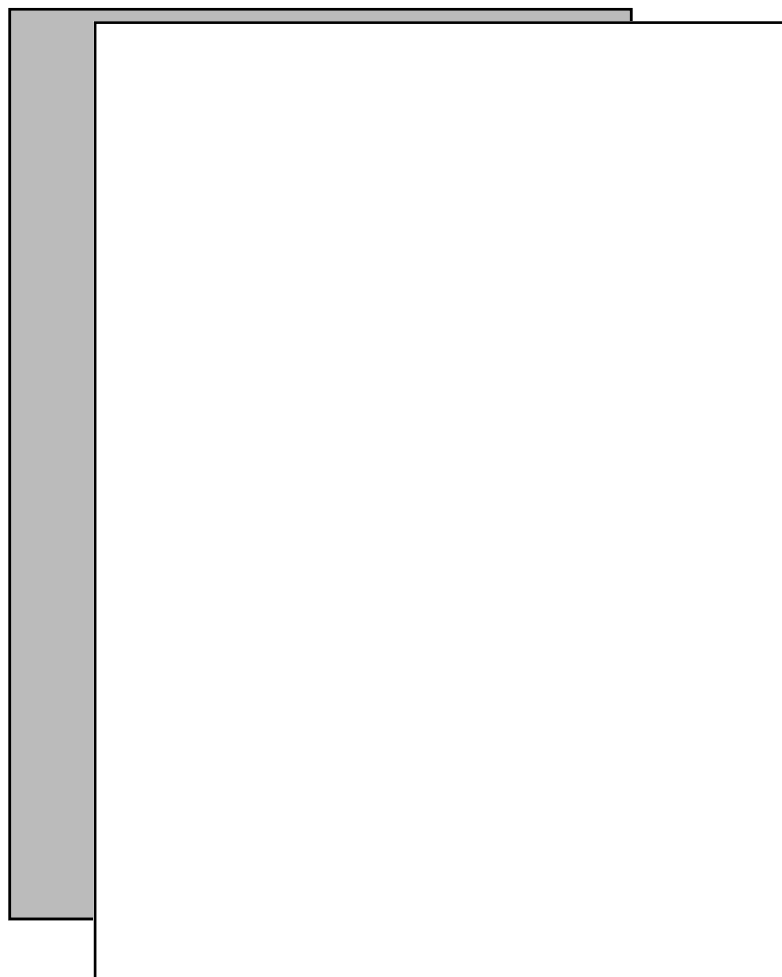
Plate G.10. Here children are climbing trees beside a stream in an area very close to a public play area that is well equipped.

McKendrick's analysis is valuable, however, for noting that as more children end up in commercial play centres, where entry is allowed only if accompanied by an adult, the likelihood is that the dependency of children on adults will be increased (p3). This research will look for signs that the local public play park may be providing a distinct context for more independent activity than that found in the back garden or on a family day trip to a commercial play centre. Perhaps the 'publicness' of the outdoor Local Authority maintained play park continues to provide a space where a vital degree of challenge and contact with the wider social world remains as commercial play centres gain a greater foothold in 'the market' providing increasingly more supervised play areas that encourage dependence in children. In this light the location of a play park, the distance from one's home, and the danger posed by traffic in crossing roads to get there, become key components of children's experiences particularly for children with disabilities. Children's preference for hiding games, the negotiation of complex routeways, and the construction of 'dens', all point to the continued value to be found in visits to local public play parks, especially those set in parkland environments.

The Natural Setting Stands the Test of Time

Others have recognised the significance of opportunities for play in natural settings. When it came to younger children in school environments, Esbensen (1991) recognised that it was important to create an outdoor play setting abundant in: (1) aspects of nature; (2) furniture and shade that allow for creative and social experiences; (3) a variety of surface textures, materials, and loose parts for children to touch and manipulate; and (4) space that allows children to move around, interact with nature, socialise, and challenge their physical dexterity. She suggested that early childhood educators assess their outdoor environment to determine whether the setting can be improved to provide a richer play experience for all children. Sobel (1996), quoting Louv's research, finds that children are spending less time in natural surroundings yet can be very connected to environmental issues around endangered animals and ecosystems around the globe through their access to electronic media. Sobel argues for less 'thinking globally' at younger ages because it leads to a premature abstraction of issues and because it leads to a form of 'ecophobia' that is paralysing. Instead he argues we need to provide younger children with a variety of real

firsthand experiences in a local accessible natural world if environmental commitment to care is to be brought about. Chawla (1988) reviewed the handful of studies into people's sources of concern for the environment. For most conservationists, early childhood 'experiences in a wild or semi-wild space' along with the 'presence of an adult who taught respect for the environment' were mentioned most commonly as the two most significant sources of commitment. Palmer and Suggate (1996) have more recently looked at these issues and found the same influences were most significant for environmental educators and for conservationists. The sources of their concern were 'experiences in the outdoors' in early childhood with hardly any reference being made to the influences of teachers or courses. Nabhan and Trimble (19940 make a case for children's access to wild spaces too:

> As children, we need time to wander, to be outside, to nibble on icicles and watch
> ants, to build with dirt and sticks in a hollow of the earth, to lie back and
> contemplate clouds and chickadees. These simple acts forge the connections that
> define a land of one's own - home and refuge for boys and girls. Mentors help
> answering questions we bring back from the land. (Nabhan and Trimble, 1994,
> p75)

In our research we will find many examples of children pointing out that such experiences are fulfilling and desirable for them too. These results have implications for the landscaping of playgrounds and the management of peripheral areas in child/environment-friendly ways.
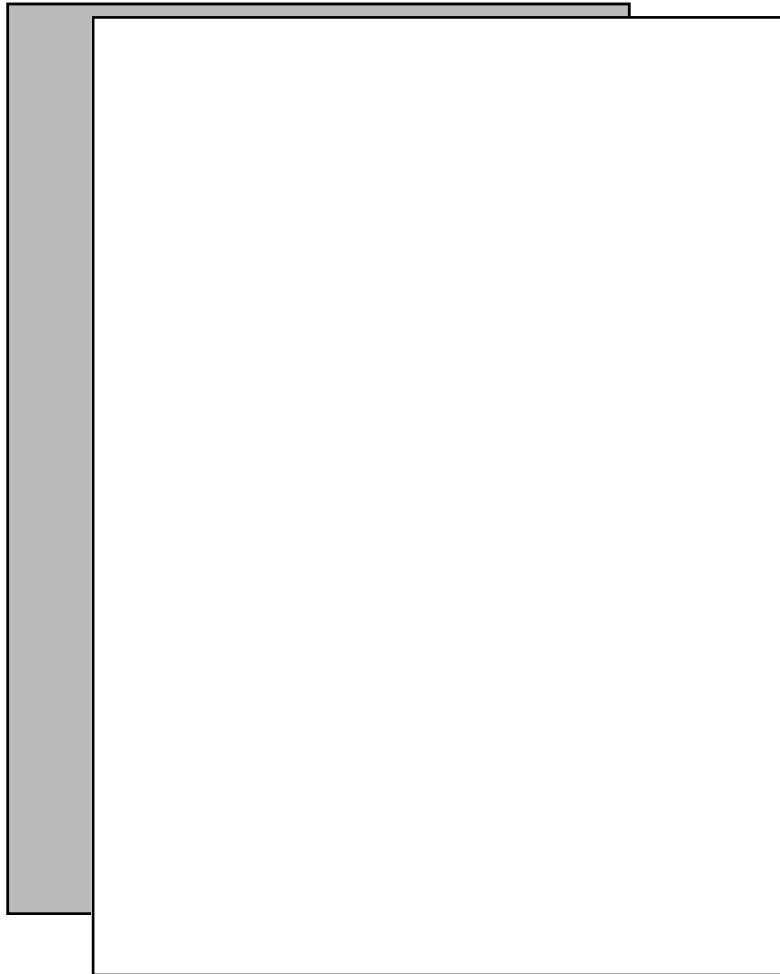
Plate G.11. Here two children took the author on a tour of their trails, pathways and 'dens' in their their most preferred play environment which was a tree and bush area peripheral to a play park. This area is managed by personnel in the Council that have little to do with play park maintenance and may not see the play value or the biodiversity value in such areas when the time comes for cutting back 'overgrown' areas of greenery.

History of Play Park Design

Frost (1992) has outlined large 'brush stroke' historical periods of play park design: the *prison period* when playgrounds in schools and in public places resembled prison exercise yards; the *ironmongery period* when large climbing structures were placed on asphalt surfaces which continue to cause loss of life and serious injury today; the *concrete pipe period* when sewer pipes were introduced for children to crawl through which is also a hazardous design strategy; and *the novelty period* where 'nice to look at' structures provide children with momentary short lived interest. I discuss the historical context of Frost's periods in history in my 'History of Children's Participation' in this study. Unlike Frost, I do not advocate that the adventure playground model is the best workable solution to the

problem of creating stimulating, rich play environments (Frost, 1992, p276). A fifth phase in the as yet unwritten history of play park design may be the reconfiguration of the play park in postmodernity under influences from new social movement: parents' activism, green activism, mobile play events, community celebrations, and children's own increased involvement in decision making will potentially reconfigure the public play space (see Chapter 10).

It would be easy to be negative enough about the future of play park design which has originally used prison recreation yards as a model. It is even easier to advance the idea that adventure play areas are the solution for play provision (Frost, 1992). But I believe An alternative to the 'play park as prison' and 'the play park as supervised adventure area' is available and viable which acknowledges the continued interest children have for 'wilder' more naturalised play settings. To introduce this alternative, I conceive of the play park as an example of a 'half-way house' between idealised 'wild space' and the domesticating influence of home or garden which finds support in the fieldwork results from this research. We can arrange a continuum of spaces to which children have various amounts of access (Fig. G.1., p41). We can begin with the child's fairly private space of her/his own bedroom, noticing how the child moves into the rest of the indoor space of the house, and at a young age into the private outdoor garden if there is one (where neighbours children can gather).
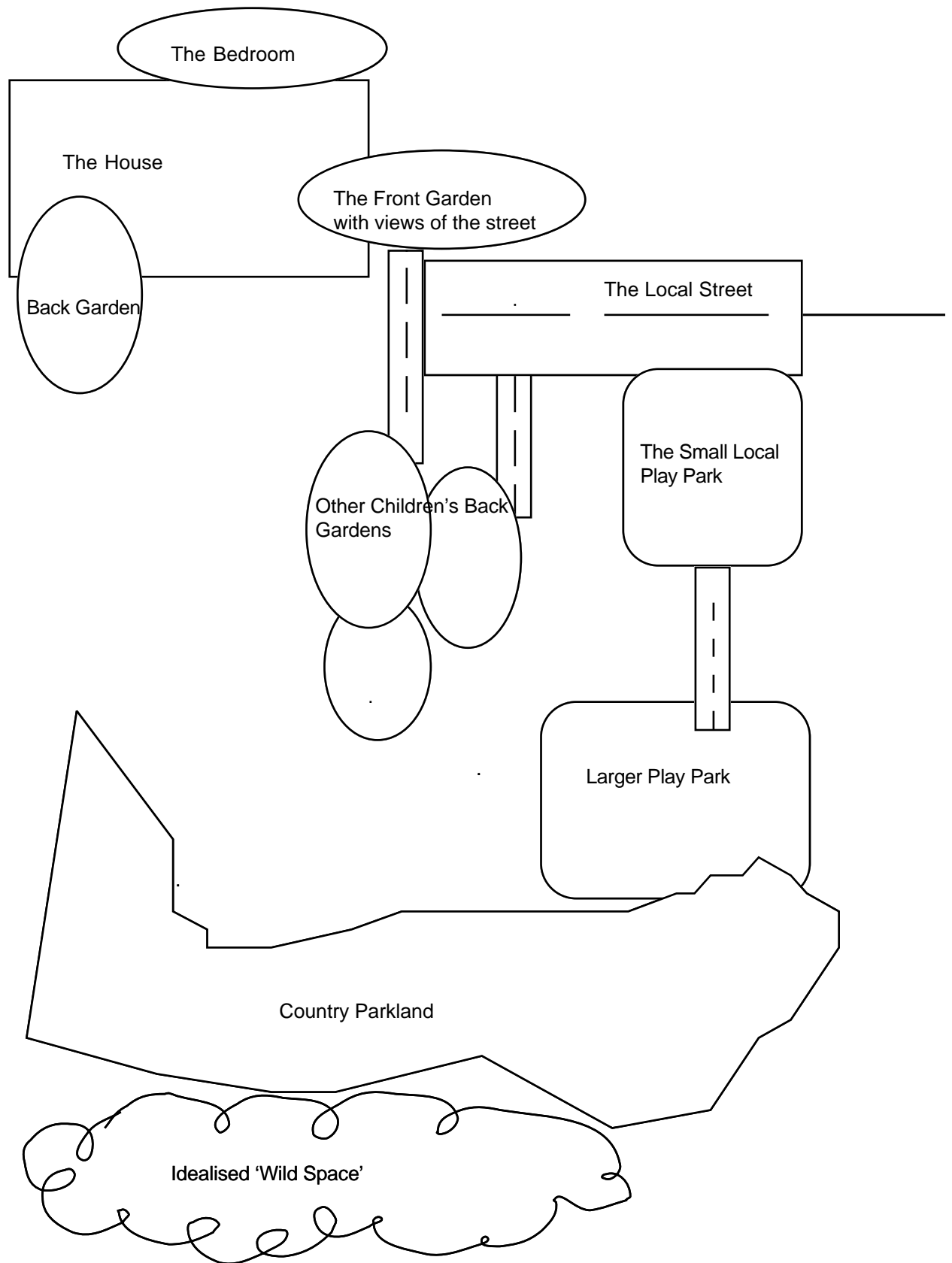
Fig. G.1. This schema provides a possible way of conceptualising the spaces colonised by children as their range moves outward with age from the home towards other public spaces in an urban / suburban setting.

Children spend various amounts of time 'at the margins' of public and private space: the boundary or threshold of the doorstep (from where traffic, road maintenance and ice-cream vans can be seen) is a key traditional playspace. Beyond lies the street which is being reclaimed by the public in some European countries as 'home zones' (see pp ?). In the domain of the local network of streets lies the playground and/or the public park. Beyond this again is sometimes found a larger network of play parks and perhaps a country parkland. Somewhere else in our imaginary is idealised or naturalised wildspace which we domesticate, eradicate or encourage in our gardening and landscaping practices.

Like all the other spaces, these spaces are appropriated by the imaginings of the minds that play or work in them. Writers about gardening, ecology, and sustainability have argued for the blurring of the boundaries between the country and the town, the wild and the domestic, and the ordered and the naturalised for various reasons. There is a rise in interest in community gardens, gardens for the disabled, city farms, outdoor classrooms, organic gardening, gardening for restoration of a variety of habitats, and so on that points to a desire to recover more celebration, variety, biodiversity, and a dissolution of sharp distinctions between what is ordered, regulated and controlled for distinct purposes; this is, perhaps, a move to recapture (albeit in a new reordered way) some of the atmosphere of Mediaeval times in our towns and cities. Contemporary ideas show how we can now reimagine how roads are not just for cars, farms are not just for food production, gardens are not just for exotic plants or regularly mown grass. In the same way, allotments contribute to the social as well as the ecological sustainability of a city, the Botanic Gardens are a place for art, puppetry and community celebrations when there are fireworks; child play specialists argue for incidental play equipment on street corners. Play parks are not just for the able-bodied and they may even not be 'just for children' anymore. Set against this are moves to configure space in strictly profit-oriented, functionally-specific ways which may exclude opportunities for such multiple use function but only regard their importance in monetary terms. The regulatory drive to name space in this way is countered by responses from social movements that seek to deregulate and reconfigure space in diverse ways: non-governmental movements or lottery agencies offer funds for public gardens, Scottish Natural Heritage give money for habitat restoration, Learning through Landscapes gives support to schools that wish to make changes to their grounds.

There is also more opportunities for cross fertilisation between the business and social worlds. The need for profitable employment need not be incompatible with the public's need for green spaces for leisure. There are now plenty of examples of partnerships between businesses and education. Local funding for schools, schemes for work experience, and partnerships to make changes that directly influence the social health of a community, a school, or specific user group are now widespread. These changes in policy make direct changes on private and public spaces and cause the older distinctions of a place for play, work, and education to be reconfigured in a less distinct way. New approaches to space use are needed that embrace multiple use functions. As weeds make it back into the citizen's gardens in the form of gardening for wildlife, so other previously unexpected space use is occurring in all manner of public and private domains. We should expect the same manoeuvres to occur in the planning and design of play parks. We will find a recognisable advocacy (and self-advocacy among respondents) in this text for the blurring of the boundaries between the spaces that are easily defined as playgrounds, country parkland, places for socialisation, and 'wild spaces' too.

The Greening of Public Space

Nicholson Lord (1994) recalls the eighteenth century landscape movement when designers like Repton and Brown worked at 'calling in the country' after a period of very formal gardening in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Unlike eighteenth century sylvan pastoralism, todays counter-urbanisation (the geographers term for the growth in the smallest and most rural places) seeks out even greater wildness. According to Nicholson Lord (1994, pp2-3), this movement is due to the continued growth of the city, the rise in environmentalism, and the increased use of the vocabulary of ecology in all walks of life. Public open, walkable space (including parks, pocket gardens, canal paths, public squares etc.) comes to represent the polar opposite of the city's worst vices. These spaces take up meanings of the wild and the natural 'on the doorstep' for those not easily able to get out to more open country. Aside from these symbolic and psychological reasons for the greening of space, there are many practical reasons: green spaces are the 'lungs of the city' filtering particulates; they can soften sound emissions; they are good for wildlife; they are resistant to vandalism; they act as carbon fixers; they can contribute to the sustainability of a city's resource use through community woodlands, city farming and allotment use.

In a similar vane, I advocate that Stirling Council could adopt a 'greening of play park design' approach that would enable these public spaces serve multiple functions: places for exploration, the provision of vandal-proof loose objects, the provision of tactile experiences for children, an enrichment of local biodiversity, the context for play that is preferred by so many children. This can be achieved by blending natural features (selected fruiting shrubs, fragrant and tactile plants, plants that encourage wildlife) into play features themselves (as in willow huts) and into zones that are peripheral to play parks. Other less obviously 'green' approaches to play park maintenance, care, and design will include new forms of transgenerational community involvement through the arts, local groups, volunteers, and youth groups. Gone is the time when a play park can be viewed simply as a space owned by the state and run by a faceless municipality.

This kind of advocacy seeks to go beyond traditional approaches to play park design. The public play park has been traditionally had a specific function definition that has been accepted by all: it is a place for children to play. The play park has largely been designed with play equipment in mind. Each piece of equipment suggest certain activities to be performed there: the roundabout, the swing, the slide. While these features continue to be children's favourites, we may ask if we have been creating enclosures that fitted our adult need to rationalise space in ways that allow only a restricted form of freedom for children's play. In this light, a playpark solely for special needs children, or the 'special needs adventure playground' could be conceived of as the segregated ghetto that places the disabled child in a marginal space away from 'normal' children. But such spaces are exceptional. Mostly, playgrounds designed with disabled children in mind are very conscious of the need to have a variety of children there; playground equipment manufacturers are moving into a new period where they try to face the challenges of designing for inclusive needs and for a diversity of user groups. (For example, they are now keen to design social spaces that include teenagers and opportunities for children with various abilities to engage in play) They are more willing to acknowledge that children use equipment in many unforeseen ways. In a more positive note, play parks may be providing an essential space for the renegotiation of multiple, differentiated identities for 'disabled children' that places the 'dis' in 'dis-abled' under erasure. This research will show how children classified as 'having disabilities' by the medical model of the term (see Oliver et al, 1996; Swain et al., 1993) are already appropriating these play areas already even when their

needs have hardly been thought of in the design process. These perspectives may serve to inform a better problematisation of how a 'disabled self' gets constructed, deconstructed, and reimagined in the future of play park design practices.

SECTION B
METHODOLOGIES

5. PROBLEMATISING CATEGORIES

5.1. The Archaeology[6] of Problems

Scheurich (1997) suggests a poststructural approach following Foucault, to cultural analysis using such questions as:

- What has made the emergence of such a problem or category possible?
- What could conceivably be a problem that was not seen as such previously?
- What has made the problems we have now the ones that are most visible?
- What previously ignored documents or pictures can be recovered into the argument to give a different slant on things?

For our purposes the categories we are interested in are 'the disabled identity', 'the public play park', and 'the promise of the fully autonomous, independent individual'.

As regards the category of the disabled child we can begin by looking at other views of the invisibility of the category and the problematisation of the members of the category with the work of Morris (1998, 1995). Her attention to the invisibility of the category of children with disabilities living away from home is a characteristic of children with disabilities in general. They are not seen, let alone heard. Morris found a lack of information about many aspects of the children's lives. They were unaccounted for in may departments and contact between departments was often lacking. They were problematised under the influences of the focus on respite care and residential care which dominated the relationship between child and social services. The social worker assessments rarely involved the views of the child which resulted in a service-led approach to care. Morris does not take on other readings of the situation that an archaeology of the story of children with disabilities might take on board. That children with disabilities is a category at all is indicative of a society that has had to institutionalise 'care' rather than have it as part of the unconscious support afforded to them as is the case with older adults in the community. A governmental, professionalisation

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[6] See chapters 6 and 8 in the main text of the doctoral thesis where Foucault's archaeology (1989) is discussed at some length as a 'method'.

of 'care' is indicative of the lack of an unconscious care for these people; it is not the case that in all societies such an institutional response is necessary or that these people are categorised and problematised in this way.

An archaeology of the reasons for the emergence of these cultural phenomena would delve into the changing size and composition of the family and the forces that conspire to necessitate that every 'adult' of typically 20-60 years of age be in paid employment and households to comprise of fewer people. Western democracies aspire to full employment of certain kinds; they require certain abilities in the work force that are regarded as normal; they name through many avenues, though mainly medical ones, what is now categorised as 'disabled'; and they present models of an autonomous, rational, thinking, increasingly more 'mobile' individual as the 'role model' for all. A structural response is to compartmentalise the 'Others' as different and regard them as less important. The result is an invisibility of disability and a lack of voice for those categorised thus. Morris's study supports this reading when she statistically describes how the more complex the needs (ascribed by professionals) and the more multiple the 'impairments' (again inscribed by others) the more likely they were to 'go away to boarding school' (1998, p116) and 'go missing'. Morris' 'Reference Group' who advised the project also suggested that children who are found to be in this 'gone missing' / invisible state should be helped by an 'advocate' who, with the right skills and power to make changes, could find out what they need and make it known. In that I (as main author) choose to take on such a role as central to my work, the activity of doing an archaeology of the problems associated with children with disabilities and their experience of public playparks then becomes an embodied political, situated and partial one. Underlying the writing of many others who call for opportunities for 'independent living' is a whole set of beliefs about normal every day activities (like washing, cooking etc). Underlying it all is a very fossilised notion that an independent lifestyle is the aim (for us all).

There is also the assumption that the 'rest of us' live independent lives of great autonomy. A closer look at the able-bodied adult category can show that this category emerges as a population of ('White Western') emperors with no clothes. How many of us can say that we can be independently mobile, that we can independently listen to others using our senses at any distance, that we can get through the day without emotional support and affection?

Even the *degree* of 'support' we need is perhaps no less that that required by those categorised as 'disabled'. Its just that our supports are specially designed to fit invisibly into the design of furniture, transport, and the like. To pity those needing support is wrongly to forget about our own experience of interdependence, deny our repressed desire to be less of 'an individual' and more a part of a commune, and to patronise people with disabilities and their life experience that witnesses to many forms of interdependence in legitimate categories of what counts as a 'daily life'. In this regard a turn of the tables is appropriate to posit an *interdependent,* decentred, communal subjectivity (as against 'subject' as agent) as a more worthy goal for humanity (see Scheurich, 1998, pp175-6). My photographs showing the coupling of adult and child who together interact on play equipment perhaps show a performance of a *shared embodied selfhood.*

While further research may be needed to elucidate the point we may surmise that physical pain and suffering get somewhat dislocated into the combined bodies of the play worker and child as a unity and that the fun play experiences getting dislocated in the bodies of the same shared coupled body. This was borne out by the children's comments who did not see their disability as an obstacle for them because of the unfailing presence of a helping other which was a taken-for-granted. My own feeling is that technology cannot be expected to perform the job of getting rid of all forms of dependency. (For example, the installation of a tap may get rid of the need to go to the river for water but only for those high enough to reach the sink!) Without doubt, technological solutions have disregarded certain categories of the population in favour of the 'non-problematisation' of the 'normal' and this needs to change, but what we need to take cultural recognition of the technologically-mediated interdependence we all experience in 'daily life'; this technology is present in our mobile phones and in the buildings and 'streetscapes' that surround us. People with disabilities remind us of our interdependence; a human response is to learn to expose our own interdependence and difference in the deconstruction of the normal for the benefit of those excluded.

5.2. Disabled Identities

Aside from age and disability, there are the other issues that intersect in the discourses that create dependency and impotency as central in the identities of disabled children. Poverty, gender, one's home address, and reductionist models of intelligence conspire are seen to cut

out options for identity choice for children with disabilities (Priestly, 1998, pp217-219). There are gender emphases at play here too: boys are categorised more often as having disabilities (and learning difficulties) above girls and boys are more likely to be sent to boarding schools for children with special needs. The public play park, like other social spaces (schools, the street) express the discourses of the normal dominant culture too. The play park may be encountered as an kind of 'identity obstacle course' which overemphasises the culturally inscribed disability of some (Low, 1995, p246).

An account of 'sense of place' is available from the field of environmental psychology where the term 'place identity' is constructed as a part of 'self-identity' (Proshansky, Fabian, Kaminoff, 1995; Korpela, 1995, Proshansky and Fabian, 1987). Here, the focus is very much on sense of self which contains sense-of-place. Psychologists will tend to believe that the developmental process can be influenced by characteristics in the physical setting and that systematic knowledge about children and their interaction with the built environment can be used to improve the design of children's settings (David and Weinstein, 1987, p4). It might be a more worthy enterprise to look at places and people in a less binary way. People impact and experience place as much as places impact on people. Place then becomes an event; 'self' becomes multiple and dependent on contingencies in place. For the task of looking at people in places as culturally co-implicated we need to look to geographers who have problematised space over the last couple of decades. The 'place' we wished to do research in was 'the play park'. In order to take on board the idea that people and place are co-implicated we needed to refer to the usefulness of conceptualising the data as *person-place-events*. (See page 18).

5.3. Time-Space Relations

Massey (1994) likes to invert our thinking and look at places as events in time that are created by a process of continual social construction *in* time. These meanings are continually negotiated by people at particular times and in particular places and are always the subject of power and politics. Following Laclau, she asserts that space is always an event. Massey (1992, p79) goes one step further: it is not that the inter-relations between objects occur in space and time; it is these relationships themselves which create/define space and time. Neither can be conceptualised in the absence of the other whether one is speaking of the local or the global. The local is always cut through with discourses from

other times and places and the global is always particularised by discourses from locally distinct places. For this research the implication is that we must ask about how spaces and their associated self-identities, get constructed by both those deemed 'disabled' or 'able-bodied'. Play parks are then seen as events in time-space that get continually constructed around particular discourses the define ability, the body, gender etc. depending on who is playing there and what they are doing. To capture any vestiges of this action the research process needs to engage in the fluid moments in a participative way. Talking and narrating (with words) may not be enough. Experience may not be accessible in dialogue alone; doing and playing will allow bodies to speak for / in themselves although the language of the body-performance may elude written description. Hence the inclusion of the visual image in both the guidance of interviews and the making of photo-texts to describe and illuminate this.

We may not do justice to a minority group by trying to legitimise or empower them through words alone. More than a 'verbal articulation of their bodily experience' (Radley, 1995, p19) may be necessary. Radley's 'strong constructionism' involves a move away from the limiting powers of discourse as mere words. It points towards an expanded constructionism inclusive of modes of acting (flirtation, dance, and play) that escape formulation without attention to performative role of an embodied self and that goes beyond written words or the transcribed ethnographic text. To do justice to the potential for understanding the person-place-event of children at play in play parks we felt the best strategy would be inclusion of pictures in the research process itself as well as in the production of this text.

5.4. The Rhetorics of Play

Brian Sutton-Smith reminds us that 'all scholars are creatures of their disposition, which may become a motivating rhetoric for them, and they are also, inheritors of larger ideological or cultural patterns that effect their scholarship' (1997, p14). He uses the studies of rhetorics done by Kenneth Burke and Ludwig Wittgenstein in supporting a rhetorical approach to the scholarship of play. He sees rhetoric as a 'persuasive discourse' that can identify the author or speaker with a belief, cause, or an ideology. He outlines seven rhetorics of play which he understands as large-scale 'ways of thought' (p8): ways of advocating a particular view of things. These seven rhetorics may be inspirational to our work here as well:

Seven 'Popular Ideological Rhetorics'

- play as (disabled) progress - By this rhetoric play is part of socialisation: the moral, social, and cognitive growth of the child. Here play is seen as developmental rather than enjoyable. In this research I shall not foreground this rhetoric of play. For the children concerned the idea that play can be therapeutic is well documented. From the child's point of view there may be other ways of looking at public play than the 'adulto-centric' notion that they must play to get better. in many cases the beneficial effects of play may be felt if enjoyment or frivolity are enhanced.

- play as (disabled?) fate - play is seen as akin to gambling or chance. To work against this rhetoric we choose to look for the possibilities of seeing how a suitable play park would not be left to chance. Perhaps, for these children, this research would be an experience of being invited to have a stake in the otherwise fatalistically destined world in which they lived.

- play as (disabled?) power - play as sports, athletics and contests. We feel that we need to look again at any rhetorics implicit in play park design that encourages competition that is weighted unfairly against children with disabilities.

- play as (disabled?) identity   - festivals and celebrations that serve to maintain or advance the power of a particular social group - power and identity in children's play. Whose identity would be celebrated most in public play parks?

- play as the (disabled?) imaginary - The world today sees creativity as an important part of our capabilities. We can work with the uninhibited imaginings of the children to look for better design solutions.

- the rhetoric of the (disabled?) self at play - play as fun relaxation and escape. In the consumerist age this rhetoric is very prevalent. Even for children with disabilities, we may witness the drive for 'independence' over any recognition of the value of interdependence. Many children with disabilities will wish to be accompanied by an adult other and will need their support. This situation can be looked at as an inversion of the rhetoric of the self at play. Their experiences witness to an inversion of the ordinary and a challenge to the overemphasis on independence today.

- play as (disabled?) frivolity - idle or foolish play that goes against the work ethic. For our purposes here we may think of the children's comments and imaginings as the voices of the 'trickster figures' or 'fools' who may have been granted a central role as

a carnivalesque figure in previous times. Perhaps these children are enacting a playful protest against the orders of the ordained world. The other rhetorics of play as fate, power and identity get jumbled up here. In taking on board what this rhetoric has to say we may have to ditch a lot of the rhetoric of the enlightenment and our over reliance on rational thought. Play may just be downright fun!

Sutton-Smith uses three criteria to judge whether there are rhetorical speaking positions behind all seemingly objective argument. The criteria are that there must be
- a recognisable groups of advocates
- recognisable affinities between the rhetorical position (epistemological or disciplinary) and the subject matter and the players they study
- evidence that the rhetorics advanced by a group not only seek to convince but also result in some kind of gain for those that support them (hegemony)

This piece of research seeks to be openly and reflexively rhetorical. We have a recognisable group of advocates: the children. We seek to use a strategic affinity between the rhetorics of play we choose and the hope for advocacy of those we listen to. We hope to advance new thinking that is more understanding of the difficulties and experiences of children with disabilities when it comes to public play: the hegemony of children with disabilities into the arenas of play park design, maintenance and location.

Yet to be able to rationalise all of the impetus of the research I do for the PhD as driven by the logic of these three rhetorical manoeuvres would be to forget the work of Spariosu (1989) whose work inspires much of Sutton-Smith's playful comments on play. Spariosu maintains that much of Western thought has been dominated by rationality. In our efforts to stay with purely rational thoughts we may exclude meanings that are irrational. Play is something that can be characterised as undetermined, chaotic and irrational. So too can our research enterprises. While not all of Sutton-Smith's rhetorics of play can be applied to our research practices, some of them are possible contenders for inclusion: the rhetorics of the play of this research is multiple in that it contains elements of research as playfully irrational and chaotic (containing elements of chance, happenstance, or chaos), research that is rational and driven for hegemonic motives for the redistribution of power, or even research that is frivolous and is practised for no other reason other than it is there to be done. Another

example may be 'research as the play of identity formation' of those being researched *and* those doing the research.

5.5. Revealing What is Hidden

An interesting aspect of Sutton-Smith's analysis concerns the interpretation of children's folklore as an art of resistance. As with many acts of subordination, it is necessarily 'underground' in nature, offstage, or unofficial (pp114-115). There are still many who assert the fundamental differences between adults and children. We culturally set them apart by many of our practices. We label films for consumption by age. We create menus for children and so on. So children are still a set apart social stratum in theory. The practice of living a life for a child may involve cutting across these prescriptions on space, time and access. The publicly accepted script for children is to get good grades at school and be well behaved at home. Privately, children's hidden scripts can be very different. Beyond the 'custody' of parents, scout leaders and the like children have a cultural life that may go unnoticed. Denzin (1977) and Corsaro (1985) have tried to show up the hidden aspects of the forgotten transcripts by looking at symbolic interactionism as a tool for analysis. Beresin (1993) has looked at playground interaction more holistically than before to uncover a child culture that is organised and independent of adults. Studies such as these have uncovered other ways of looking at play and children's culture other than from the perspective of play as developmental progress. A purely developmental view of children's play will fail to see the politically performative acts of play that the children in this research enacted. We need to employ some of the other rhetorical ideological speaking positions outlined above to do justice to the group of children for whom I wish to give advocacy. We can use the rhetoric of play as the identity formation of community to understand children and adults collaborative play; we can use the rhetoric of play as active participation in political change to describe children's participation in the research that seeks to make a local difference.

6. TOOLS AND METHODS

6.1. Photographs and Text: Tools for Catalysis-Analysis[7]

The roots of the practice of using photographs as integral to text are to be found in photojournalism, in newspapers and magazines, and in the photographic essay genre epitomised by the epic *Camera Ludica* by Barthes (1981). Mitchell (1994, pp9-14) gives us a commentary on the 'pictorial turn' in in modern thought which has brought us towards a more visual paradigm. Along with such discourses as cultural studies, the terrain has changed. We no longer have texts with images 'added on'; now we enter a period of new 'imagetext' generation that searches for a combination of aesthetic and ethical practice. Photographs are no longer seen as innocent records of real events: the photographer, spectator and the reader are now all problematic. Whichever way we look at it, we must accept that the human subject is constituted by language and imaging (Scheurich, 1997, p24) which we can call discourse or the language of cultural formation. He outlines the potentialities for suturing images and text: photographs acting as slaves to text, sites of resistance to the flow of the text, or, collaborators with with the text. John Berger (1972) advocates the inclusion of images that enable more new ways of seeing that go beyond the rational. He emphasises the use of the imagination by the reader and asks for more than an attempt to see purely rationally. Visual images are concerned with the transition between the inner and the outer - between self-identity and place-identity (to use the language of psychology) or between a landscape 'out there' and an inscape produced internally to the person. Photographs enable identification with other experiences we have had; the allow for an invitation to express narratives, to tell a story. Ambiguity is central to the viewing of images: an 'open sensibility' (Berger, 1972, p164) is encouraged. Beginning with the assertion that most sociologists have eyes, we can suggest that sociology needs to relearn to look at the world.

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[7] A discussion of the uses of photography in research is given in chapters 10 and 11 of the main text of the thesis.
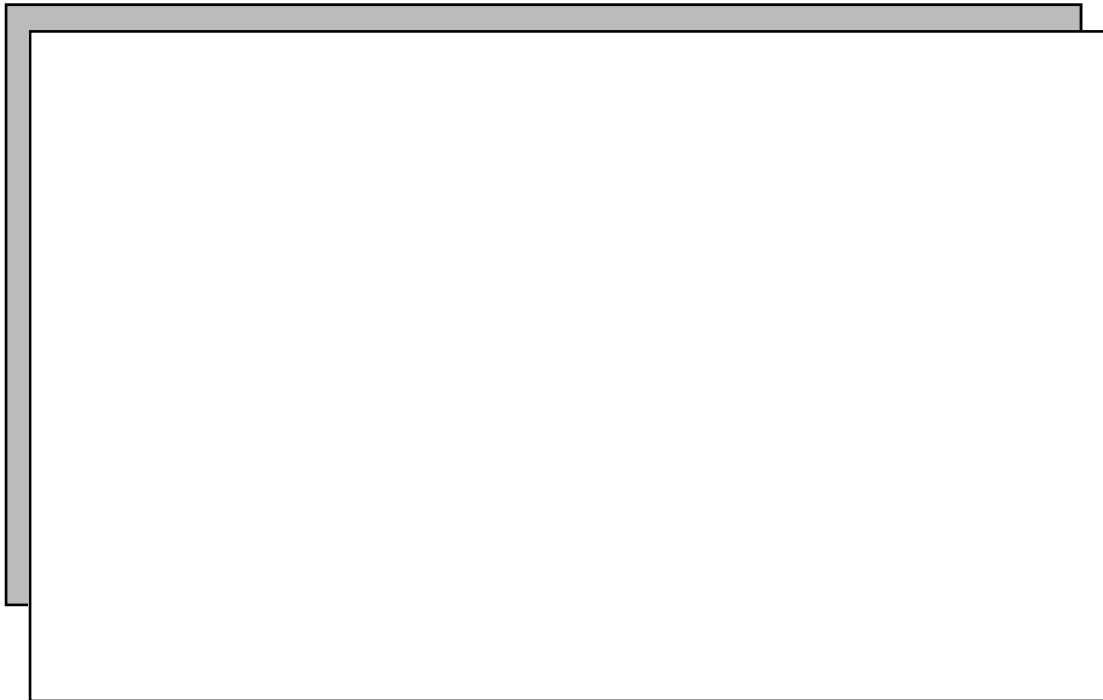
Plate G.12. Can we feel and be moved by what we see?

With this theoretical approach behind the use of images in the research we allowed for the use of photographs within textual production in a few ways. Photographs can be included

- as a specially selected set of images that would guide the interviews, i.e. 'takes' on public play (photographs taken from a number of sources that reflected a wide variety of public play settings: play park equipment, natural settings, outdoor commercial play settings);

- as 'takes' of the work of the befrienders (photographs taken by befrienders with written information on the back);

- as 'takes' of performative acts of the children (photographs taken by the researcher as part of the 'interview process');

- as 'takes' on the research process itself (see plate G.17.) inclusive of 'emblematic' photographs that expose the contested and agreed aspects of our interpretation as a collaborating team.
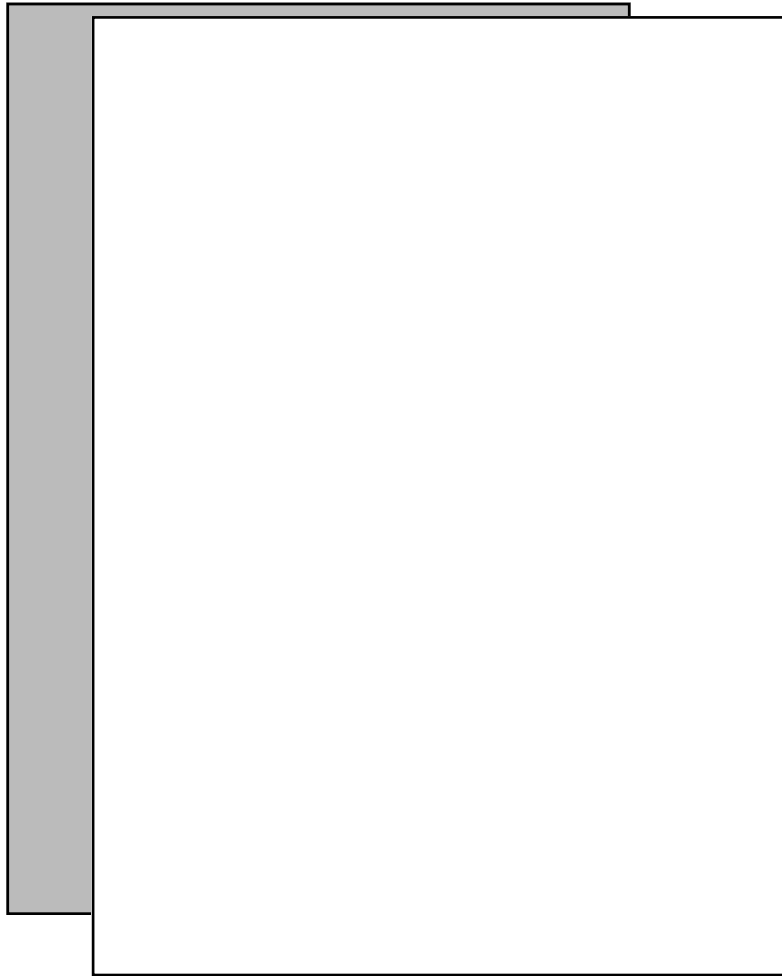
Plate G.13. Befrienders were encouraged to take photographs while 'out and about' with the children in their care. These photographs were given an initial interpretation by the befrienders who wrote on the back of the photographs. These ideas (and many others) were later 'checked out' by the interviews and in the workshop.
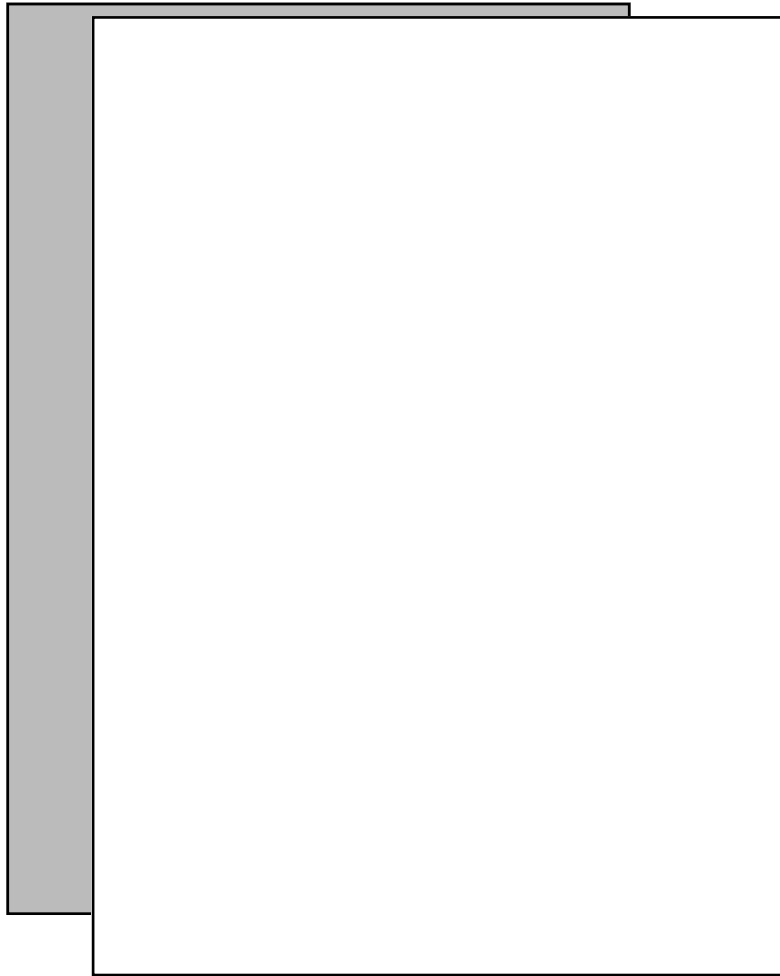
Plate G.14. Here a girl who has finished her interview with the author 'performs' for the camera with her friends to show where they play 'hidee' in their back garden. In involving the children in the performative action of the research their agency in giving voice is increased. They became co-performers in the process.

Plate G.15. A boy working closely with a playground designer during a workshop session.

Photographs openly accept that there is 'fabrication' and 'framing' going on, and in a way, this was the point. They are selections from time and space and so are interview transcripts, statistics and so on. Any set of data can be read in multiple ways. The research process would actively encourage this multiplicity. So, photographs were used in different ways in different contexts in the research process: they were used as guided imagery to help engage interviewees; as catalysts to remembering key places; and events that made up the experience of 'public play'. Photographs were also used to develop ideas among the befrienders who had themselves taken photographs to narrate their ideas and who critically viewed photographs taken by others. Finally, the image-based approach to the production of this text can, potentially, elicit new understandings for the reader about how place and identity inter-relate for children with disabilities.

In summary, the benefits to the research process of using an image-based text approach can

be outlined here:

- Photographs Are A Familiar Part of Contemporary Culture. They provided an accessible entry point to discussion and interaction among all those involved. The colour images were an index to a now familiar interpretive world to us all: the visual image.

- Photographs Encourage a Non-foundational Approach to Knowledge Generation. The culture of cinema and TV also encapsulated the notion that multiple 'viewings' of the image were possible. Images are powerful and can be employed for a purpose. They can can subvert text or support it.

- Photographs Keep People Interested and Focussed. The presentation of slides to the steering group generated as much enthusiasm as those used with the children or with the befrienders.

- Photographs Allow for the Generation of Political Awareness and Action and New Forms of Advocacy

- Photographs Allow the Reader Opportunities to Engage in Reflexively Viewing People in Time and Place in a New Context. Many of the images represented local people, places, and events that legitimated this kind of information and gave weight to tacit, local stories. In their back gardens, and in the local play parks, children were invited to 'show us what it's like' with the knowledge that the photographs would be 'shown' to others later. Informants were told of how 'these others' (adult decision makers) would like to make changes to how play parks are designed and constructed' using any information they could glean from the research. The aim was to move away from naive realism of 'telling others how it is' and away from any voyeurism of the 'smiling cripple body that needs charity' towards an enabling political practice delivered by photography. It was our intention not to show the children as victims but to begin a politicisation of the issues of public play by inviting them to participate in action for change. They could show us how they play in their back garden, and in the play park. By performing actions they might expose oppression as latent in society and take the impairment out of their bodies. For other children, it was more an opportunity to celebrate their bodies, their play, their supportive collections of friends and so do away with any perceptions of 'disability in the child' through fun.

- Photographs Provide a Stage for Performative Acts. The photographs could be viewed as performative acts of communication; the bodies inscribed a new text: it was a physical language, a dramatic presentation of person and place interaction to tell a story. All the

time the hope was that there was the possibility for greater participation in processes of change in how public play parks were conceived and designed. This was dependent on multiple 'readings' of the transcripts and the photographs. Every photograph shown was an event with potential to reveal another dimension of the story from a different angle. The viewing and reading were all ongoing events that were continually (re)framed by the politics of the context. Any singular realist ontology was never assured in these multiple readings and viewings.

• Photographs 'Travel Well'. Another benefit of using of photographic images is their portability: if designers, children, parents, befrienders could not all meet at one time and place in a setting conducive to new communication, then other ways of representing 'voice' could be tried. Emblematic photographs combined with a subtext could be represented at another time and place to help with a re-construction of what is seen - providing opportunities for a new 'take' on things.

6.2. Methods

The research methods were worked out in some detail, initially, by a collaborative working group which comprised: staff from Stirling Education Services, the Administrator of *Playplus*, a researcher from the University of Stirling. For the steering group, the questions we were implicitly trying to ask required that the children and their carers could find ways of narrating 'revelatory stories'. In dealing with the nebulous aspects of discourses imbued in spatial relations, we worried that language might fail us in the effort to (re)present what might be more apparent in practice or even in pictures. It was decided that a number of methods could coalesce to get the best results that would allow for the greatest advocacy for the children involved in the research. This methodology could not be fitted easily into a narrative approach aimed at listening to previously 'excluded voice' (see Booth and Booth, 1996, p55-6). Instead, a critical praxis approach to local knowledge generation about how we might make specific play spaces better for a constituency that was premised as being possibly in greater need. As researchers, the adults among us felt sometimes that we were the ones 'at the margins' of the child's world: this text is then posited as marginal to these worlds we often failed to understand. We were the ones with the 'special need': to know things that were the 'taken-for-granteds' of another's world and to know how these taken-for-granteds get produced. Thereafter, we would try to find ways of changing these spatially inscribed power relations in new ways. We needed to find strategic methods to do this. The

particular methods we chose were:

- the use of photographs selected by the steering group (inclusive of befrienders) in advance of interviews to flag up a loose direction for the interviews which would be semi-structured;
- interviews of children with disabilities (usually within a family setting);
- the taking of 'action-shots' by the interviewer after the interview when a visit to the garden or local play park was an option;
- collaborative interpretations of both photographs and transcripts by steering group, the children, and befrienders;
- the use of 'text and image' on A1 sized boards to be used in a workshop setting where people could meet and use the early interpretation for further clarification and for coming up with design solutions. Designers, patrons of the research, a well-known representative from playground equipment manufacturing, site designers, children, their parents, and befrienders could work in different ways throughout one full day to discover the practicalities of effecting change in how play parks get constructed.
- Further analysis of the findings and presentation of different forms of 'Report' for different audiences.

6.3. Participants in the Research Process

The participants in the research process can be named as: The Children, The Befrienders, The Steering Group, The Student-Researcher (main author of this text), The Sponsors.

Children and Where We Find Them

The children who were chosen as key informants were 'classified' as having a multitude of different 'impairments' or 'difficulties' depending on which model of disability one uses. An open mind was kept on whether the disabilities would be 'found' in the environment or in the bodies of those we interviewed. But to look only in these places for problems would be too dichotomised. Taken-for-granted assumptions about who is an 'ordinary 'able-bodied' member of society lead us to assume that visual, aural, learning, emotional and mobility difficulties will affect how person-environment interactions will occur.

6.4. Sampling

We did not attempt to select the children to be interviewed as a sample that would represent all children with all the varieties of disability that exist. The small sample was selected collaboratively using selection criteria and intuitive sense of what would be the best representation of the user population as a whole. A small sample of nineteen children was selected using these criteria. We felt that the sample should include:

- children who were users of the befriending service
- children who had a variety of disabilities and 'represented' a reasonable sample of the 'global population' of children with disabilities only in that they were the 'best' sample that we could reasonably expect to work with in given the time constraints and given that some families would facilitate easier access to children than others for interviewing in the home
- children from Stirlingshire region that represented urban and rural backgrounds
- children from a spread of socio-economic backgrounds
- children of both genders (but we had more boys than girls because of the weighted nature of the population of children with disabilities in favour of boys locally and nationally)

The sample included seven girls and twelve boys. The disabilities recorded on their profiles were tabulated thus:

GENDER	AGE	CONDITION
Girl	6.5	Cerebral Palsy (uses wheelchair and a walker)
Boy	10	Cerebral Palsy with visual impairment and Moderate Learning Difficulties and left-hand grip only (uses a wheelchair almost all the time)
Boy	7.0	Cerebral Palsy with a hearing impairment (uses a wheelchair mostly)
Girl	8.0	Cerebral palsy with Moderate learning Difficulties (uses a wheelchair)
Boy	8	Aspergers with Mild Learning Difficulties
Boy	9	Aspergers
Girl	12	Dyspraxia with Mild Learning Difficulties
Girl	10	Dyspraxia with Mild Learning Difficulties
Boy	10	Mild Learning Difficulties
Boy	10	Mild Learning Difficulties
Boy	10	Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy with Mild Learning Difficulties (uses a wheelchair mostly)
Boy	11	Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy
Boy	8	Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy
Boy	12	Foetal Alcohol Disorder with Mild Learning Difficulties
Girl	6	Mobility Problems
Girl	7	Epilepsy with Moderate Learning Difficulties (uses wheelchair sometimes)
Girl	8	Angleman's Syndrome with Mild Learning Difficulties
Boy	10	Language Disorder
Boy	9	Autism with Mild Learning Difficulties

Derrida talks of how the writing of a text is like an act of violence. The above list seems to disembody the children we knew in the research. My desire to make the children anonymous above is perhaps because of a previous act of violence that categorised them with the names of diseases and 'impairments' that do not conjure up an appealing identity: their first names all mean a lot more to me now as I look back. But we agreed earlier on in the research that we would not use their real names. Their photographs may mean something more to you.

The Befrienders

The befrienders working with Playplus were involved in early discussions about the scope of

local sites that are user-friendly for children with disabilities, and could illustrate their thinking on how public play parks differed to other play venues (like country parks, farm centres, etc). The befrienders also took photographs of some key play experiences that illustrated features that made life difficult or more accessible for them and the children in their care. They took photographs of play experiences they felt really worked well, of play parks in use by children with disabilities, and of other play facilities. They wrote on the reverse side of photos to give their 'take' on the shot. These comments revealed their sense of advocacy for inclusion, their celebration of multiple forms of play, and a practical concern with how new 'rights of way' (see Corbett, 1993) might be given to those in their care to access play park equipment when they found features were experienced as obstacles either to themselves or to the children.

The Dis-abled Interviewer/Researcher

'Ableist', adultist constructions tell of how the informants would have 'restricted language skills, habits of compliance, lack of self esteem' etc.. But it was not for these reasons alone that the interview process would not be over determined. Due regard for difference requires an open-ended approach to interviews that acknowledges differences in culture, age, and in this case, even nationality (as the interviewer was Irish). Notably, some child interviewees would not generally talk freely or take over the control of the interview due perhaps, to factors like the type of communication disability they had, their sense of self esteem, etc.. In contrast to what is regarded as the norm in good narrative research (Bertaux, 1981), this is not necessarily to be regarded as detrimental to the quality of the narrative approach (see

Booth and Booth, 1996). For the researcher, occupying a role of 'visitor' in an unfamiliar world, was a destabilising experience for the interviewer. The world of an intimate family, with all the unspoken communications, the world of the child with 'a difference' that's accepted, and celebrated in the family settings pointed to a greater disability found in the researcher in his quest for 'findings', asking the wrong questions, being baffled by local Scottish colloquialisms.

You, the Reader

This text reveals only selections: what was glimpsed by the camera, by the interviewer, and by the collaborating team that read the transcripts. The text will fail in being complete but may yet create useful debate among those that read/experience it. As readers you will have to work with the shards we had to work with: the stuff that falls onto one's lap and, more importantly, the stuff that falls between the cracks or is hidden between the lines in any inquiry. As readers, you will also have other echoes to work with: from your own experiences in other times and places. As readers, you are thus engaged in this research process too. You are a welcome participant!

6.5. Interviews

We adapted contemporary notions of how and with whom the 'interview' could take place. These 'events' took place in a variety of contexts: the back garden, the living room, the play park (and these settings are contextual to the kind of 'knowledge' or 'narratives' produced). In the same way, the presence of significant others would colour what was spoken about and in what frame of reference. To best describe these 'interview events' we shall call them 'family interviews' or 'community interviews' as they usually involved parents, neighbouring children or other siblings. In advancing some theatrical metaphors, we could say the variety of 'set' and 'dramatis personae' effected the research process in terms of the change in questioning style and content and in the ideological understanding of the interviewer over time.

Mostly, the interview was conducted in a living room with the parent(s), foster carer, siblings or sometimes neighbour's children present. In one or two cases the child was interviewed alone when the parent/carer felt comfortable to let them 'get on with things', when asked to be left alone for a period, or when telephone calls interrupted. Sometimes the parent/carer

would then be interviewed after the child had finished; on other occasions, the parent/carer was an active participant or 'listener-who clarified' or added on extra pieces of dialogue to enhance understanding. The focus often moved around from issues relating to the needs as carers, or issues arising from the children's comments which sometimes surprised the adults. When interviews were more 'collegial' and community-oriented, the interviewer tried to ensure that the 'child's voice' was heard *first* with others giving clarification or other narrative content to illustrate points made. The inspiration here was that *families* and *communities* are users of play parks, not just children but that the children's experiences were central. In this way, we could acknowledge the possibility that different versions of 'self' could be exposed: the self of the child in the family, the parent 'in role' as carer, etc. that ran in agreement with the non-essentialist version of 'self' as bounded and distinct which inspired this methodology. There were multiple 'selves' to be discovered. Non-singular 'I's became present in transcriptions. We actively invited the 'I-thou' (Buber, 19) to narrate its active becoming. This approach grew out of the research team's agreement from the outset that play parks were places for parents, and carers as much as children. In many cases, adults actively helped children onto and between apparatus and in some cases the adults were users of the play equipment as active 'players' too. We, therefore, were on the lookout for a dissolution of the binary notion that "adults work and children play" in the responses. Also, it was possible that traditional notions that disability was to be found in the child or in the environment, were not to be foundational expectations.

In the interviews some children took the opportunity to make clear statements about what they thought about play services. Others expressed their needs for inclusion and exclusion with or from other children in play settings. Still others gave a commentary on their struggle for self-agency within 'caring' family structures. Parents and carers, too, got opportunities to tell their side of the story: their need for transport, their desires to travel and have variety in the parks they visited (over and above the children's opinions), their suggestions as to how play features could be simply improved to make them more user friendly for children like their own.

It should be noted that the purpose of interviewing these children was not to use an ethnographic approach to finding out 'the truth' about what it is like for children in playparks. We did not attempt to interpret their comments with a truth value in the classic

ethnographic sense. Instead we were driven by a pragmatic desire to find out if there were practical things that could be done to enhance play value for them in public play areas. The research was oriented in a critical action-research mode to make things better for our chosen constituency: the children with disabilities. While their narration of their play experience was invited through the use of photographs, the visits to play parks, and an open-ended nature of interview style, the thrust of the investigation was for the interviewer to find out what was working well for the child and what was not working well in terms of equipment, the context, and location of public play parks as well as their comparison with other play opportunities they had. This placed the emphasis on the environment rather than an any construct of an impaired body.

Other words we can use to best describe the tone of our approach are embodied, partial and positioned (Haraway, 1991, Braidotti, 1994). Another appropriate description would be that the research offers a standpoint epistemology (Denzin, 1997, pp53-85). We were were embodied in that we needed to acknowledge the affective, empathetic, and sympathetic aspects of our engagement in the research: at times we would be frustrated, unsure, or possibly driven by a desire to care for others in the research - we acknowledge the related aspects of our existence as humans rather than attempting to achieve a traditional objective relationship with respondents. One's embodied nature is also concerned with a physical and spatial dimension: the research involved many moments where as researcher I would would play with the children or be involved in lifting the children onto equipment.) We are partial in that we seek primarily to enable the self-advocacy of the children in the research and only sought out ways of encouraging advocacy for the children by a second party as a secondary fall back (if we felt we needed to clarify or get an adult view of what was being communicated by the child or what someone felt needed to be communicated; the befrienders intimate knowledge of the children's abilities, likes, dislikes and ways of communicating was vital here). We acknowledge the positioned nature of our separate and at times cross fertilised roles in the research as 'adult inquirers' with various experience in the field: we may play different parts - researcher, befriender, manager of play services, designer etc.. These positions are not fixed but are open to change as a result of any part of the process of doing the research: things read, experienced, felt, or heard.

Denzin (1997) offers us the potential of using a standpoint epistemological approach.

Collins (1991) is perhaps his best example of this form of text. For it to work readers must desire to understand and fell their way into the experiences of another group. The reading (and observing) of a text will work if it helps people to (even spuriously) create events that allow readers to emotionally understand the experiences of the other group. The lived experiences of children with disabilities are, hopefully, allowed to enter into the text by the inclusion of photographs and ethnographic transcription. The text is to be performed and function evocatively as well as rationally by this understanding. We acknowledge that in privileging photographs and written words that we exclude other forms of knowing. In using photographs in interviews with some children who had visual disabilities we were hardly doing the best we could to include them. Yet we did work to get advocacy for these children too. Their carers could interpret for them and we also visited playgrounds to enact their play experiences that could then become part of the narration of experience.

6.6. The Supportive Environment

We hoped to create a supportive environment wherein children with disabilities can have a say through the use of family interviews and workshops etc. In supporting the children as participants in the research we sought to create situations where creative solutions could be found so that the future experiences of public play for children with disabilities will be experiences of

- independence *and* playful interdependence,
- experiences where choice is widened,
- experiences where their rights to public free play were enhanced and assured.

This piece of research has been proactive in trying to assure that change will happen rather than reactive to complaints or changes in the wider society. We attempted to be user-led in our decision making and design practices. We sought workable creative solutions to problems presented within the constraints of budget, available design resources and the limitations on time and energy.

We did this by exploring their experiences of play in their back gardens where some specialised environments had been created for them by their parents and carers, in commercial centres for play (like open farms or swimming pools), and in public play areas.

7. INTRODUCTION TO ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

7.1. The Background to the Interview Responses

Introduction

In this chapter we shall present a sequence of grouped analyses of what the Replay Project Steering Group felt were the 'findings' of the transcribed interviews and associated visits to play parks. It is informed by many other documents referring to research on public play either implicitly or explicitly. It is useful to restate here that the general motivation behind the research contains the desire to encourage the self advocacy of children's opinions about how public play could be made better and advocative for children if there was a feeling that they could not speak for themselves in an understood way. In the same way this text will now be *advocative* about what responses as designers, manufacturers, and providers of local public play spaces may need to make to *what we perceived as* their needs. This document, as with so much of the research was, at time of writing, *in process.* By this we mean it is still open to revision, adjustment and reinterpretation.

7.2. Three Action Research Cycles

CYCLE 1 - *PREPARING THE WAY*

The steering group felt the best people to inform our thinking would be by communicating with the children themselves, their parents, and their the befrienders who regularly take children to play parks as part of the befriending service offered by Stirling Council. To get the opinions the befrienders on board in a clear way they were provided with cameras and/ or film to take with them on outings. They were encouraged to write on the backs of these photographs to explain their points of view. Later, some of these photographs and some photographs from archives in the Council of local play parks were collated into a 'photo-set' which would act as a guide for semi-structured interviews with the children in family settings. The fact that some of the children being interviewed were actually present in the photographs meant that they would get excited about seeing people they knew and perhaps feel that their opinions would count.

CYCLE 2 - *THE INTERVIEWING*

Whose Comments?

As the interviews were in family settings, the responses were sometimes from parents, sometimes from children, other siblings or neighbours. There were two reasons why this was felt to be pragmatic. Firstly, we hoped the children could gain greater advocacy if their carers could clarify what they felt needed to be said. Secondly, the play experiences of many children was intimately shared by their adult carers who also experienced elements of the frustration or enjoyment of different play structures or play contexts. For these reasons the interviews were conducted collaboratively, *inviting children's responses first* and clarification from carers and adults later.

What Were the Issues Arising From the Interviews?

The following list recognises the many facets of experience witnessed by those interviewed:

- **The Location of a Public Play Area**
- **Spaces for Adults**
- **Perception and Awareness of Danger**
- **Sand and Water**
- **Handrails and Bridges**
- **Slides**
- **Seats and Swings**
- **The Flying Fox**
- **Surfaces**
- **Climbing and Scrambling**
- **Back Garden Equipment**
- **Paying for Play**
- **Dens, Huts, Willow Houses, Tree Houses, Trees and Plants**

Initially the transcribed interviews were read and any commonalities between them noted. Some aspects of the responses were coded into the groups listed above. These were available for inspection to the steering group. In sectioning off related comments we then set about writing these commentaries and bulleted lists with the view to using them again on a second cycle of interpretation. In approaching the 'data' in this way we have followed some basic requirements for an action research cycle. In engaging in research in this manner the

children are positioned as collaborative active agents for change *along with* the other participants in the research.

CYCLE 3 - *THE WORKSHOP*

Out of the first cycle of the research process (the interviews) many intuitive 'findings' were emerging. It was felt that we should 'check out' whether these were correct or not and whether workable design solutions could be found. A presentation to sponsors and a practical design workshop session was arranged for March 4th, 1999. On that day new questions, thinking and design solutions resulted that would add to the initial interpretation of interview transcriptions. The workshop day convened children, parents, befrienders, and designers and planners in the same venue. Over the period of some six hours, the adult participants worked through a briefing and got focussed on the afternoon's work when children, parents, and befrienders were involved in working closely with designers to come up with design solutions to perceived problems or design features that would enhance the play park for their use. There was an opportunity for the sharing the results of the day in a plenary session at the end of the day. In effect this followed the broadly action research cycle approach to generating useful knowledge for Stirling Council in their efforts to improve their provision for children with disabilities. While the main aim of the research was to *make a difference* to the design and planning practices of the Council, there was also the awareness that the participants themselves were to be 'moved on' in their understanding whether it was as children or adults: designers could work on conceptualising their ideas on climbing for mobility-restricted children, parents could think about their role as supporters and conveners of play events; the children themselves could experience taking part in making a difference to their locale and so on.

How Did The Workshop Run?

What we intended to do on the day was to address the real and problematic aspect of play park design *as we saw them* as a steering group by further informing our thinking through communication with the children, parents, and visiting designers. The day also worked as an information event for the sponsors of the research.

The morning started with a presentation to the sponsors. A report of the research to that date was made available. The focus for the morning was about sharpening our thinking on the

issues and the possible outcomes so far and in setting up the context for our roles in the afternoon as facilitators, recorders, child supporters etc. The process for the morning involved showing some slides of children in action on play park equipment, discussing what we felt we knew about the issues in hand, familiarising ourselves with a series of 12 or so boards that had pictures and quotations from the interviews on them. The colourful display boards were set out to stimulate discussion as well as to collate the voices of the parents and children in an accessible way.

Plate G.16. An example of one of the display boards that functioned as a focus for each workstation.

The accessibility of the images of the children themselves in action in play parks was important for encouraging and catalysing participation in the afternoon.

Lunch was provided which included many tasty, bite-sized, and 'child-friendly' options to suit all ages. There followed a slide presentation for the visiting children who got an opportunity to see themselves in action on play equipment in play parks and in their back gardens. As with the display boards, this was an important contributory factor to the overall

workshop atmosphere in that it reaffirmed the children in believing that we wished to take their views seriously and in convincing them of their own importance as participants in the research. We were not just concerned about new play structures - we were concerned about the views of children who might use them or who might like to actively suggest alterations to them. Showing specially selected slides of the children also served to remind them of the issues and stories we had uncovered in the interviews and further catalysed the afternoon's work.

The Afternoon Workshop

The afternoon workshop focus was very much about finding design solutions that were practical. The process of the afternoon meant that we looked at the thirteen groupings that were derived from the interviews in groups. In order to use the display boards effectively, they were spread around the room and were used as points for active engagement by working groups. Each group had (insofar as possible) a facilitator, a recorder, a designer, a parent, a befriender, and a child or two who would convene at each display board in the manner of a workstation. There were about twenty people involved in all, six of them being selected children from the interview respondents. The workstations were:

- The Location of Public Play Areas,
- Spaces for Adults,
- Perceptions of Dangers,
- Sand and Water,
- Handrails and Bridges,
- Slides,
- Seats, Swings and Roundabouts,
- The Flying Fox,
- Surfaces,
- Climbing and Scrambling,
- Back Garden Equipment,
- Paying for Play,
- Dens, Huts and Willow Huts.

Plate G.17. Here One of the sponsors, a designer and one of the children work through the details of a proposed design solution. Collaboration requires that the children learned about the constrains on what is possible too.

Working in different groupings (facilitator, a 'designer', some children, with other 'supporting' adults) we worked through a few workstations each and spent time on the tasks set. The groups were given direction by the workcards (simulated for readers in chapter 8) that were set out for them for each workstation. At each point the children were encouraged to discuss and critically appraise their own suggestions and the suggestions of the designer. They were invited to rethink their ideas and to do some drawing to illustrate their ideas. By late afternoon we had worked our way through many ideas and gathered together to do the reporting back and summing up. It has to be said that the facilitation of the event was not easy. The children were expected to concentrate and attend to the issues but were free to take time out an play or chat about other things too. At times when concentrations lapsed, the children sometimes ended up climbing in and around the furniture and hiding.
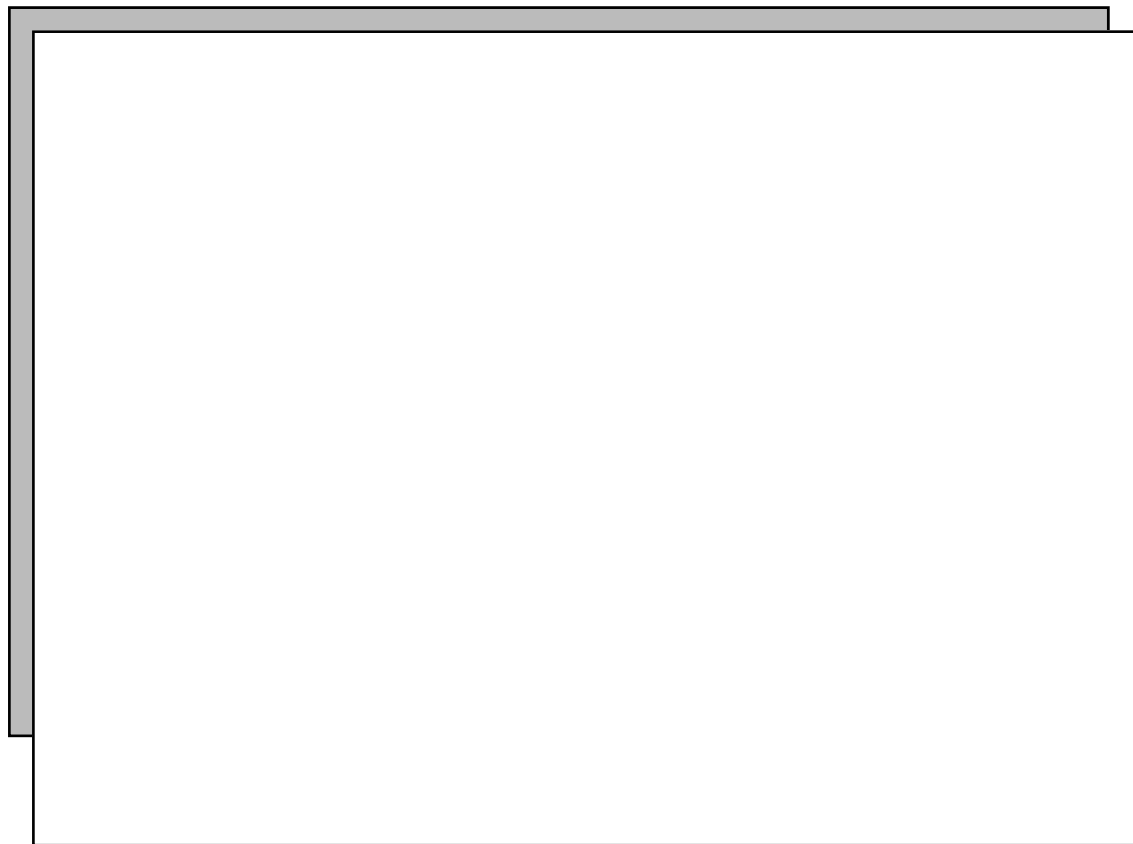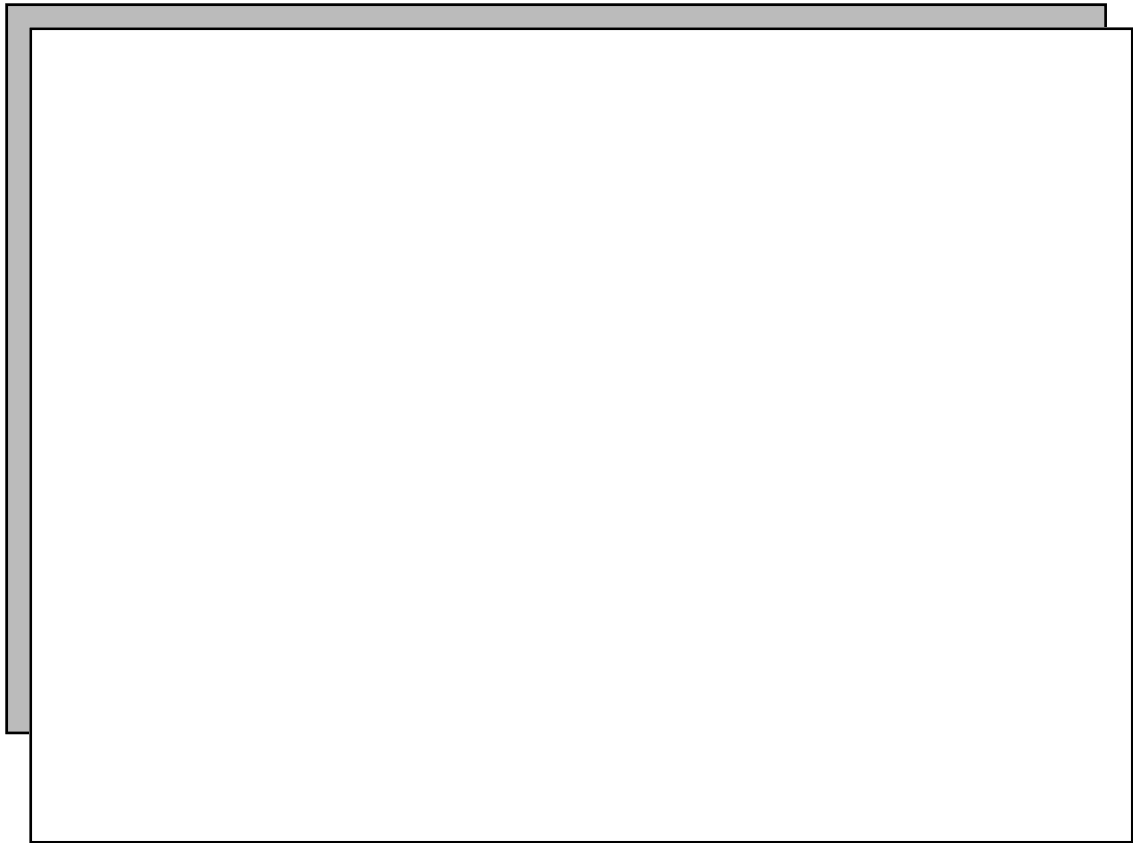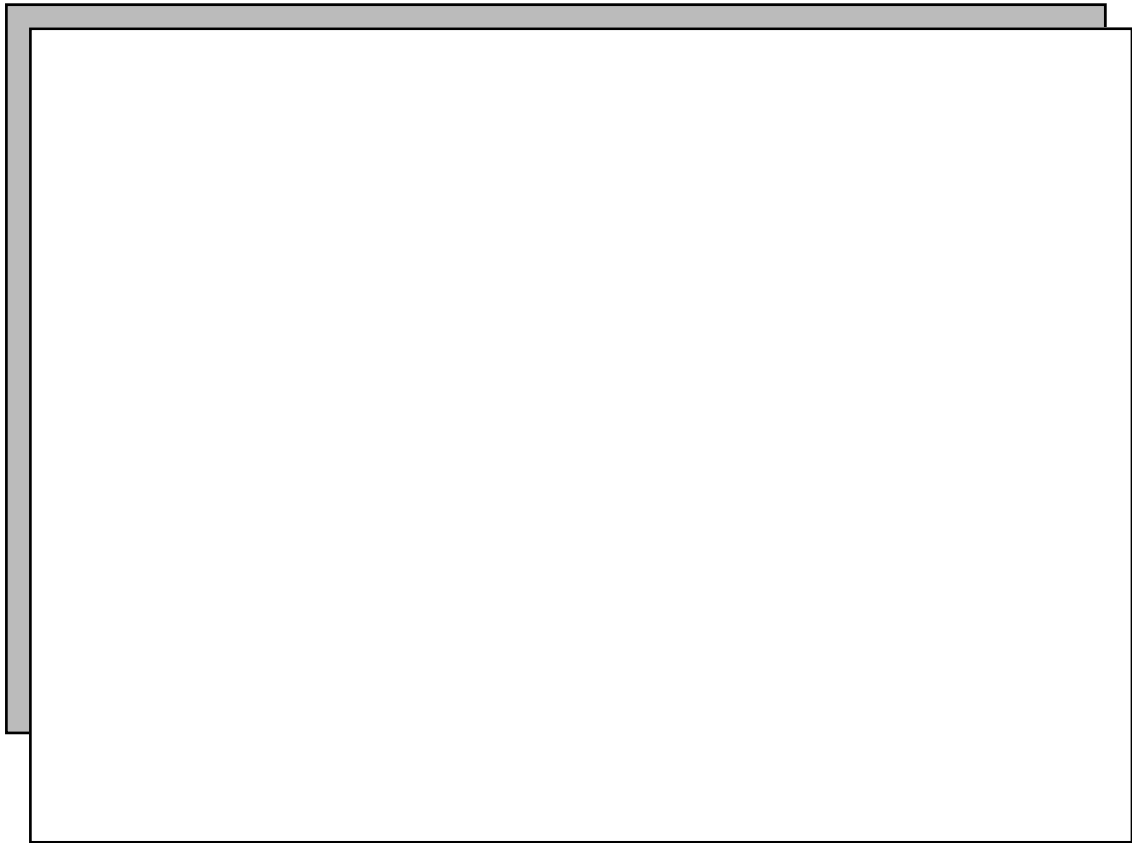
Plates G.18, 19, & 20. (Above and previous page) Some photographs of the workshop day showing the children, designers, parents, and the author at work.

CYCLE 4 - *INITIAL OUTCOMES, FINDINGS AND ACTION*

The early findings or outcomes from the study can be categorised into four sections:

- **outcomes from the workshop**
- **findings about the general use of play areas by children and their carers and the division of roles of adults and children**
- **findings about the context of the public play area when compared with commercial centres and the back garden and the context of the public play area when considering its location and the perception and experience of dangers**
- **findings that led to practical design solutions for the local authority**
- **findings that are reflexive discoveries that resulted from the process of attempting this kind of research in the first place.**

The first of these is dealt with hereunder. The other categories of findings are dealt with in thematised form in the next section: *Analysis.*

Outcomes from the Workshop

An appraisal of the day was initiated by telephone interviewing the visiting designers. Later, many of the prototype designs were installed and tried out in situ in selected play parks. In some cases, this meant going along with specific children to their local park and working through in more detail any alterations proposed. While tailoring local parks to particular local children may seem an impractical way of spending funds on play parks for children with disabilities, it is a viable way of trying out new designs that may be included in all sites later. This piecemeal problem-solving approach builds on real relationships that can be sustained between the Council and the users of play parks. By addressing local needs in a targeted way the Council can effectively monitor and assess its efforts in making local parks accessible to those who actually wish to use them regularly. As already mentioned, research findings and experiences have shown that a centrally located and supervised 'special needs' or 'adventure play park' is probably not as viable or as practical a solution for Stirlingshire where populations are not dense and are dispersed around the region. Also, it is felt that spending money on *some changes* in all play parks, and selected changes in certain play parks, will make a stronger statement about the desire on the part of planners to make

provision for disability in mainstream public places where it can be considered part of the norm.

Our experience in involving children in participating in planning and design of their own play spaces was a fun but challenging process. It uncovered our own beliefs and perceptions of how we constructed the value of play in public spaces for children with disabilities. It allowed some opportunity for communication between the key adult carers, some designers, one play park equipment manufacturer and the children themselves. While it has to be said that this involved a lot of time and effort in planning and facilitating the research process it was felt to be worthwhile. In the now common rhetoric around Article 12 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, it can be hard to find practical examples of how to go about encouraging children's participation. This research is an example of how one local authority went about making some reality out of the rhetoric. That it should attract attention from others wishing to do the same kind of work with children that gets beyond consultation and takes adult-child dialogue seriously is indicative of a change in attitudes. That it should be seen by some as an exceptional piece of participative research is indicative of the need to include children of all ages and backgrounds in changing their locales.

SECTION C
ANALYSIS

8. FINDINGS SPECIFIC TO PLAY STRUCTURES AND PLAY AREA DESIGN

This section presents analysis of the issues brought out by the research process with reference to play area structure, design, and location. Each section may contain some comments from the children, some commentary by the main author, and some bulleted list of summary analyses. These pointed us to considerations for future designs of equipment, sites or the site-context of public play generally. These were addressed in the workshop and the outcomes and findings from that day are listed. As main author I have included my own particular interpretive response under the headings of 'RESPONSES'. The different fonts used and the divergence of 'style' in this chapter reflects the emergent approach we tried to take with the children in the workshop day. As readers, you are invited to take part also, albeit in a simulated and distanced way. This solution-focussed analysis is an attempt to unify the text in a more readable way and to make the information accessible to a variety of reader-types including those interested in redesigning public play with children with disabilities in mind. A further summative commentary on outcomes and actions arising from the research is found after this section.

8.1. The Location for a Public Play Area

Mother: They have got an adventure playground - its like a little fort from a distance - but its all in a wooded area covered in trees.

Mother: The play park is different to my back garden because there's a lot more children there - the children like to watch other children and there's obviously a lot more than what I can have in my back garden - you know, swings and climbing frames.

Greg: But the fact that this playpark is within 15 metres of your house makes a big difference?

Mother: Yes

Mother: We have done that one - that's not a bad park actually - its quite a good park

Child: Yeah

Greg: Plus its near the shops again?

Mother: that's one reason - but the actual park is quite a nice one and you can sit in it and its nice - its a nice area - because there's houses there its not sort of remote and some parks are.

Child: I would like to sit where that tree is.

- - - - - - - -

Children and parents noted what kind of 'site-context' attracted them to certain play areas. The provision of particular equipment within play areas was also important to their judgment of how 'good' it was.

WORKSTATION - <u>The Location of a Public Play Area</u>

WE CHECKED THIS OUT

THEY WOULD LIKE A PLAY PARK THAT IS SITUATED ...

- In a partially wooded area with open areas as well.

- Near their home (especially for parents of younger children)

- In a place that conjures up 'a sense of adventure'

- In a place that local people (who know the children) can overlook the site

- On a well-used route to and from school and/or the shops

we Briefly discussed

- What makes a play park different from the back garden or a play centre that you have to pay to

  get into.

SUGGESTING SOLUTIONS FOR

- **Making the playpark more visually and structurally *different* from the back garden or commercial play centres and also more attractive.**

- **the need for a space that has an easily visible boundary but also has access to a green / landscaped / outer environment**

- **the desire for the creation of a sense of 'wild green space' adjacent or integral to a play park**

  - RESPONSE: While most play parks do fulfil the need to be different from the back garden, it is recommended that Stirling Council's policy of installing innovative and new forms of play equipment be continued. As back gardens become better equipped, the differential between the back garden and the public play space is thereby maintained through the inclusion of new forms of equipment alongside traditional swings etc, the increased use of colour, and the creation of spaces that conjure up adventure and trail finding through the introduction of child-friendly landscaping inclusive of bushes, fruiting trees, perennial flowering plants, areas of long grass in incidental spaces. The hope is that children would come upon spaces that they can make their own by the introduction of potential 'found' places that are enabled by clever landscaping within the bounded space of the play park or peripheral to it. While there are possible problems (of which we are unaware) with encouraging 'gang huts', 'den construction' etc by local children the benefits of allowing them to do so have not been discovered either.
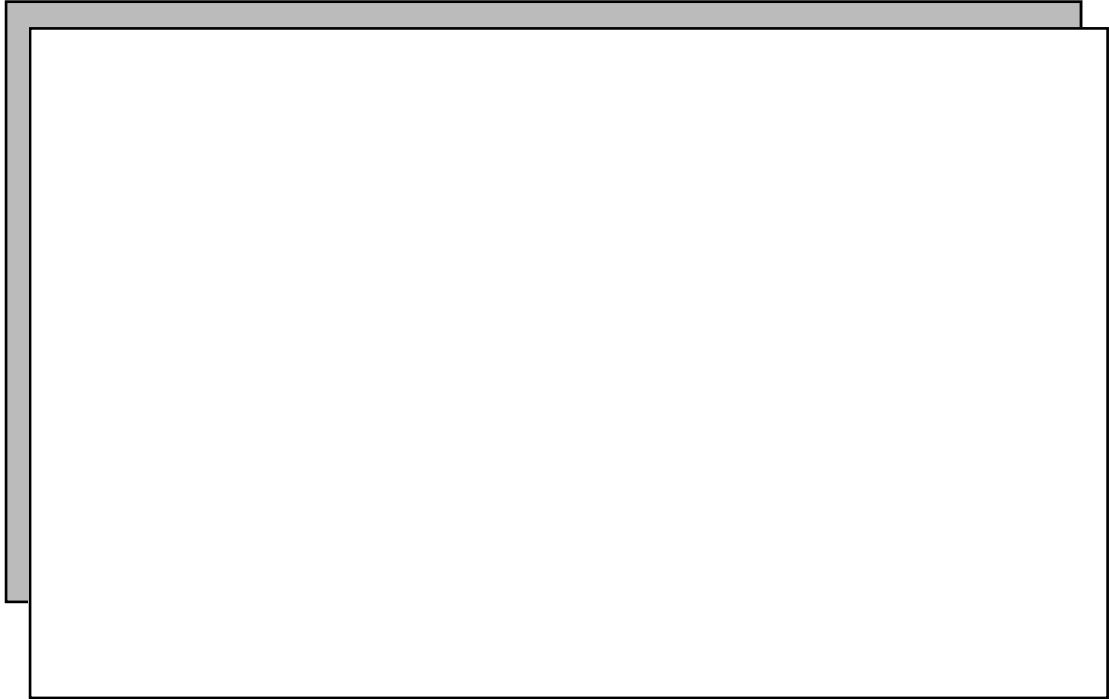
Plate G.21. This play park's location (site context) was seen as desirable by many children during the interviews.
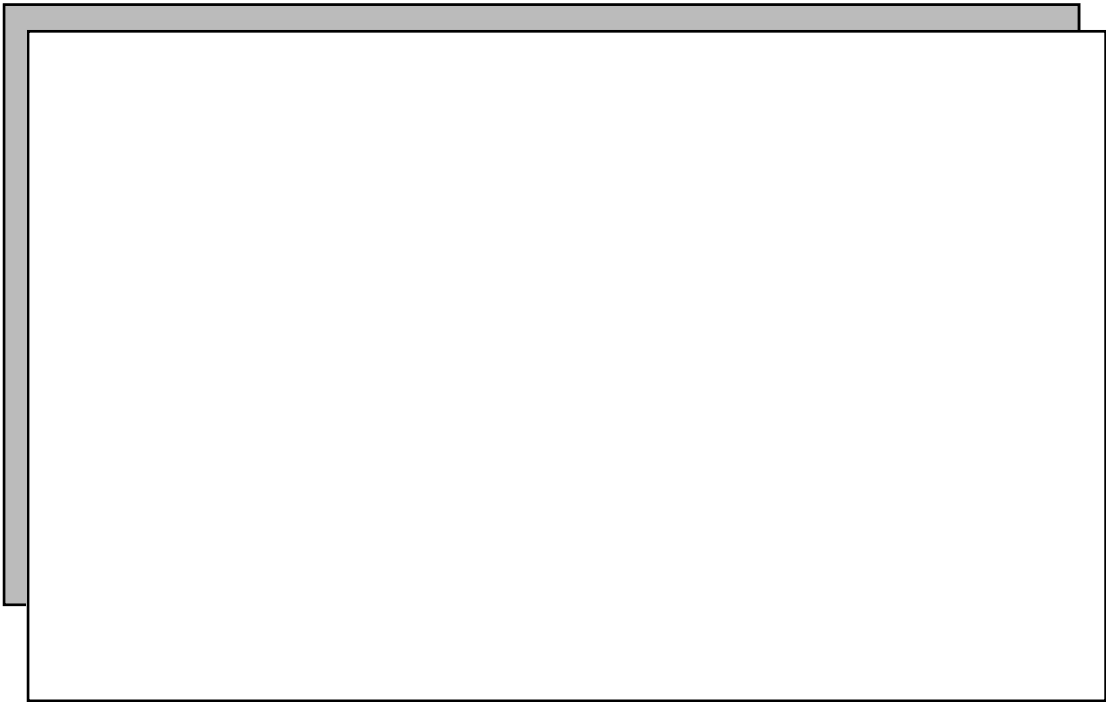

Plate G.22. These children walk on ahead of the adults to get to the local play park. They are free to go there on their own because there is little traffic in the cul-de-sac and the play area is overlooked by 'friendly neighbours' who 'keep an eye out for them'.

8.2. Spaces for Adults - *ADULTS' ROLES IN CHILDREN'S PLAY*

Mother: Everybody wanted to make the top - I made it - I do these adventure things as well!

Mother: I normally would say 'Let's have a go at this'.

Mother: I just kind of stand back and let them do a wee bit more on their own.

Mother: I usually stand underneath and just make sure that they don't miss their feet and go through and fall forward.

Child: She helps me and that - with stuff that I can't do.

Mother: That is a big frustration for her....the length of time it takes her to get on equipment and off equipment .

Mother: If they have got seating areas or picnic benches you can sit and have your picnic or read your paper or magazine while the kids are away doing whatever they are doing.

Father: I like to keep an eye on him.

Mother: There are no older kids in that park and that's a big factor in letting them go themselves.

Mother: I mean there will be at least one house near the park, where if my children fell, they could run straight in that door and say 'Can you help me'.

Mother: There's I think a lack of places to sit.

Mother: There isn't a lot she can do independently ..... apart from sit and dig in the sand.

Parents and carers commented about how play spaces might meet their needs as well as the needs of the child in their care. We can assume that for children with disabilities, the play 'event' is often associated with the presence of a carer either in an intimate role of physical support on equipment in 'bridging' or lifting the child or in a less dependent role of observing or possibly pretending not to observe while the child plays independently.
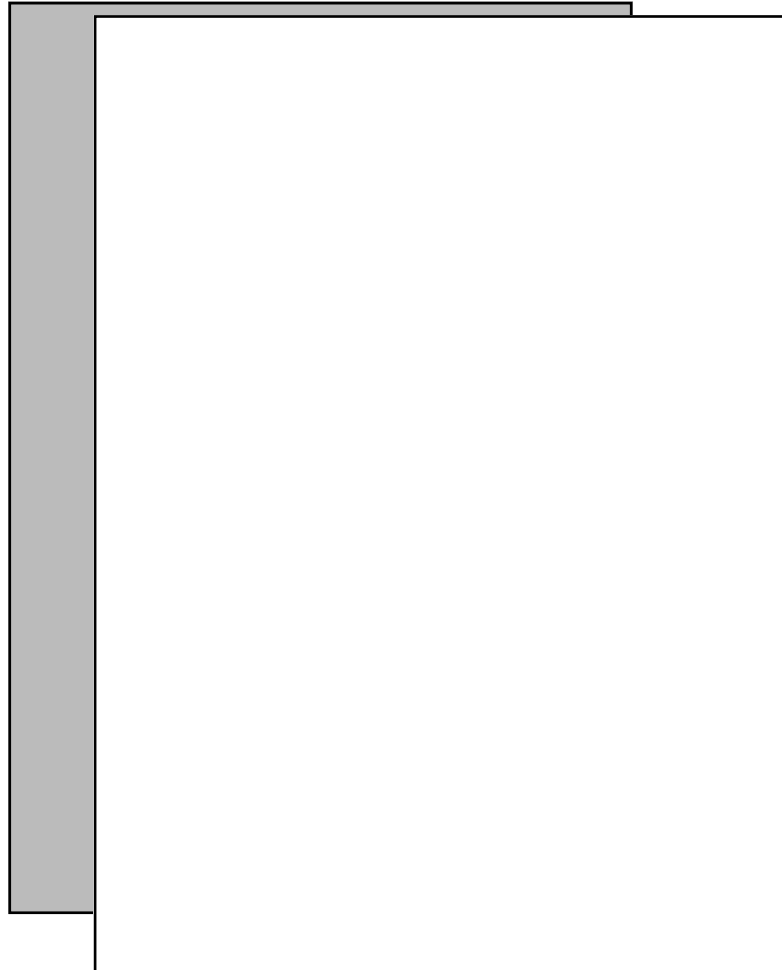
Plate G.23. Some equipment is regarded as unsuitable for children and adults to negotiate together.

WORKSTATION - <u>Spaces for Adults</u>

WE CHECKED THIS OUT

THE CHILDREN AND ADULTS WOULD LIKE A PLAY PARK THAT HAS ...

- A place to sit and view the action and 'keep and eye' on their own children and on other children too
- A shelter form the rain
- Space to get on and actively engage in the equipment with the children as support, as a bridge, as provider of encouragement, as a 'safety net', as a provider of kinetic impetus on slides, swings etc
- Space to get on and actively engage in the equipment with the children at the same time: teeter-totters, slides, swings etc.
- Opportunities for activities that are fun, high, and exciting for adults as well as children
- Opportunity to have a variety of levels of intimacy with and distance from the children
- Opportunity for encouraging the social interaction of the child with other children
- Play spaces that allow adults ease of access onto equipment especially when lifting is involved - especially slides, swings, and rotating play equipment.

WE FOUND OUT / BRIEFLY DISCUSSED ...

- Which pieces of equipment cause difficulty - don't 'work well' (when children are being lifted or when adults are accessing equipment to play on it or to support a child)
- What other reasons adults like to be close children playing besides safety and physical support

WE TRIED TO FIND SOLUTIONS FOR...

- **Parents'/Carers' desire to 'keep an eye' on their children and children's desire to hide and play 'secretly' out of view.**
  - ◻ RESPONSE: A response to this question hits at the very heart of our understandings of what we conceive of the play park's role in provision in the ever growing compendium of leisure options. The rhetorics of some play theories suggest that play is 'for children's development' . This theory excludes the possibility of understanding play as a bonding force between adults and children. The former ideology results in the design of play areas are set-apart from places for adults. Many comments from carers and adults generally show that there are substantial (and probably increasing) numbers of adults who wish to access equipment themselves and play with their children. This reflects some theorist's claims that

adulthood and childhood are moving into a more shared cultural space. Designers of play parks may come under increasing pressure to make play parks places for adult bodies too but we may be a long way from seeing this as a general demand from all parents who will be glad to have their children occupied and 'out of their hair' for a period. Most adults will still see play time in a park as a relief from the concentration of minding their children; for many, the play park is a place for letting their children go and play with the confidence that there are plenty of things to do and less chance of risk and danger than in many other environments. It is a debate worthy of further research but I would recommend trying out a shift in play park function and a move to incorporate more adult-friendly structures and equipment for play, as well as incorporating seating as close as possible to some play equipment for carers. The specifics of how to do this will need further thought and creativity before workable solutions could be recommended.

8.3. Perception and Awareness of Danger

AWARENESS AND PERCEPTION OF DANGERS BY THE CHILDREN AND THEIR CARERS

Child: I could get murdered down at the play park. They caught a boy with Buckfast.

Mother: The park is too far and too close to the main road, they are not allowed to go there themselves.

Child: I just think about being careful so that I am not going to fall off the swing or anything

---

Mother: I would quite say I was quite paranoid [about the child's safety].

Mother: There are bottles in the bushes, they can be broken, there can be sharp bits, their clothes get caught, they get scratched.

Greg: (summing up some earlier comments not included here) So Wallace Park is definitely a winner and we like Wallace Park because it is enclosed and it has lots of barriers around the climbing sections and there's plenty of challenge without being dangerous.

- - - - - - - -

Children's comments showed that they were being actively made aware of 'dangers' by their parents but that children actively constructed their own views on what was dangerous through the generation of their own local knowledge and through their independent interactions with the environment.

WORKSTATION - <u>Perception and Awareness of Danger</u>

WE CHECKED THIS OUT

THE CHILDREN ARE GENERALLY...

- Aware of dangers from strangers

- Aware of which equipment is not accessible without adult help

- Aware of the need to be careful crossing the roads

- Aware that they need to be more careful when alone on equipment

- Aware of the possibility of broken glass, sharp objects, stinging nettles, and bushes that could catch on clothes

- Aware that older children vandalise and damage things

WE TRIED TO FIND SOLUTIONS FOR...

- **Making the journey to the play park safer (traffic controls, footpaths, cycleways, adults' help)**

  □ RESPONSE: We need to consider routeways to and from play parks for children of all ages. Off-road paths and cycleways shall become increasingly more important. Traffic calming measures will become more important for children's access to public play areas. Reduced speed limits (20mph) can be encouraged in residential areas.

- **Keeping play parks cleaner**

  □ RESPONSE: Regular maintenance of play parks will involve cleaning up around the periphery of sites and taking particular notice of broken glass and other hazardous waste. Coordination between different departments may be necessary to prevent the cutting down of key play areas in landscaping that borders play areas. A more rationalised policy of responsibility of audited areas of green and landscaped areas for children's play is advised in local authorities.

- **Making play parks safer**

  □ RESPONSE: It is recommended that regular checks of play equipment be continued as good practice. While fears of strangers, teenagers, and older children may be unfounded it is probably prudent to acknowledge that they are 'real' fears for many children and parents. It is not recommended that all areas within a play park be within view of carers, For younger children, the possibility of a boundary fence is recommended if children are able to go 'out

of sight' in undergrowth etc while within a playground; this would allow an element of private and independent play for these children while still being in a safe environment. Similarly, younger children may prefer the opportunity to visit play parks specially designed for them that discourage older children form using them because of the nature of the installations there.

Plate G.24.   A child demonstrates his awareness of the dangers of broken glass found in the bushes. His local knowledge about this patch of ground outstrips his mother's in this case.

8.4. Sand and Water

SAND AND WATER AS LOOSE OBJECTS

Child: Sand is nice and smooth.

Child: I just sit and play with handfuls of sand

Mother: ... for hours

Mother: He loves water.

Father: He plays with water here.... first chance he gets ... he gets the hose out.

Child: If I have got a teddy [or something] I bury it and then I try and find it again.

Mother: He likes to use the sand to make a dam; he likes the feel of the mushy mix - both together.

Plate G.25. Sand and water play is especially important for and favoured by younger children generally and many of the children with disabilities involved in the research. The study revealed the generally positive attitude that children had regardless of age.

WORKSTATION - <u>Sand and Water</u>

WE CHECKED THIS OUT

- Almost all the children love sand and water play

- Younger children were more vocal about their preference for sand

- The feel of both is of particular therapeutic importance to some children

- Children like:

    - just feeling the quality of the sand water (e.g. smoothness)

    - burying things and finding them again (e.g. toys)

    - using containers, hoses, and other play things in conjunction with

      sand and water

    - taking off socks and wearing swimsuits for water play

    - mixing sand and water together

SUGGESTING SOLUTIONS FOR...

- **having a play area that allows children to mix sand and water**

    □ RESPONSE: The proximity of sand and water features was brought under scrutiny. It was

      thought ill-advised to have the potential for sand to be carried into water features by children

      because of the possibility of blocking drains. It was felt that it would be best if water could be

      transported to a sand area instead. By having a self regulating tap situated at close proximity

      to a particular (well-drained) sand area the opportunities for playing with sand and water

      together would be increased.

- **the need to allow access into sand and water areas**

    □ RESPONSE: The children themselves came up with the idea that a bridge could be

      constructed to get wheelchair users into water and sand areas. A design of the bridged

      entry was drawn up by the designers in cooperation with the children. Children in

      wheelchairs could then have the experience of water around their feet and be lowered into

      the shallow water if they wished. The play value of such a design would be of benefit to all

      children with the right planning and design of such a colourful bridge. A design has been

      drafted of how such a bridge would look and be installed (Fig. G.2. below).
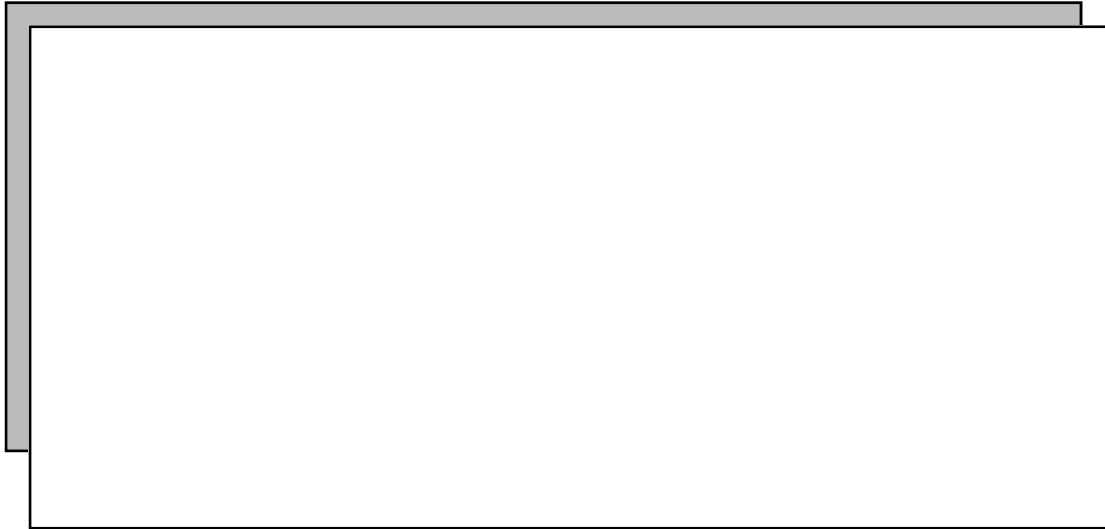
Fig. G.2. This is a design solution to the problem of getting children on walkers and wheelchairs into and out of sand and water areas. It could be designed to allow children in wheelchairs to have their feet in the water while still seated in their chair in paddling areas and can allow for children to transfer into water and sand areas more easily. It was a design that came out of the workshop day when children consulted with the designers on problem solving with their befrienders and parents.

Plate G.26. This water play feature is a favourite with many children though some mentioned that not all taps and pumps were accessible to children in wheelchairs.

8.5. Handrails and Bridges

HANDRAILS

Greg: (summarising): So you would like to have something to hold on to?

Child: Yes

BRIDGES

Mother   (discussing Camperdown Country Park) ... So they have got - they have got walkways, wooden walkways that look like those ones that wobble - but they don't wobble

WORKSTATION   - <u>Handrails and Bridges</u>

WE CHECKED THIS OUT

SOME CHILDREN WOULD LIKE MORE HAND RAILING ON...

  • any structure where steps were used as access

  • on bridges (especially 'wobbly' ones)

  • along pathways between the entrance gate and the play equipment.

SOME CHILDREN WOULD LIKE MORE ACCESSIBLE BRIDGES OR RAMPS...

 • between pieces of equipment

 • on approaches to platforms and slides

WE LOOKED FOR...

Bridges or hand railing in the photographs that they think would work well for them.

SUGGESTING SOLUTIONS FOR...

  • **Better bridging between platforms**
    □ RESPONSE: Even those children who do not use wheelchairs but have mobility problems prefer solid bridges with handrails. An optional secondary routeway across a solid bridge would be beneficial to these children. More 'wobbly' bridges need not be excluded for general use by other children.

  • **Handrails and ramps that give the best approaches to play platforms**
    □ RESPONSE: A sketch of a possible solution for providing wheelchair and walker access to

the beginning or end of a play park structure (e.g. fig. G.3) was put together on the day of the workshop. This design solution addresses the problem of surfacing for wheelchair users who would find it impossible to stay in the wheelchair while crossing over soft sand or bark chipping (see fig G.3. below).
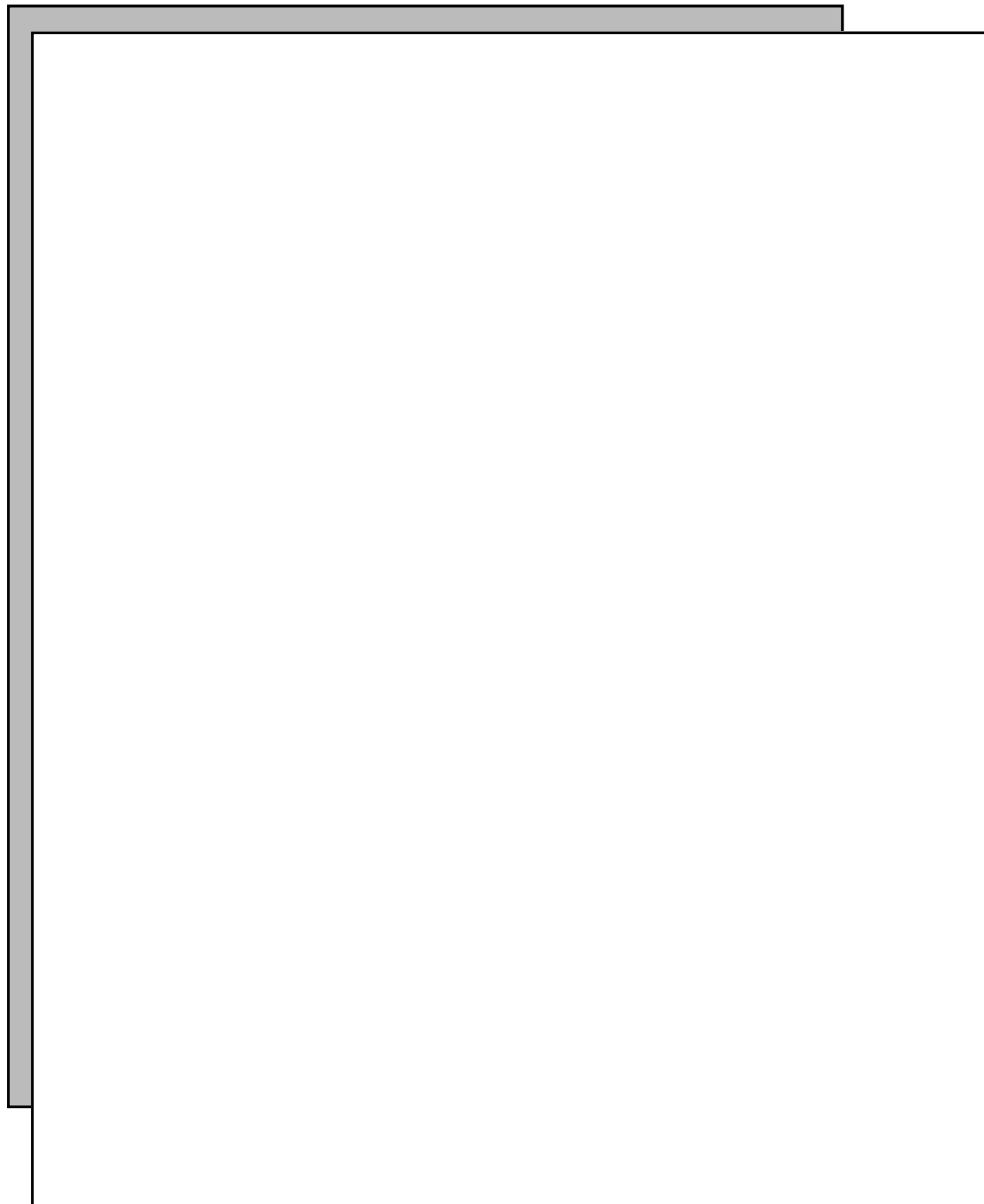
Fig. G. 3. This sketch shows a possible solution for improving access onto the beginning of a climbing structure or in the case above for getting on the chair again after having been on a slide. Obviously, getting to the top of the slide is a different problem which is dealt with in the section on slides.

❑ RESPONSE: Another proposed solution came from a young girl of seven who suggested the installation of a pole in the ground at a point of access where surfacing was bordered by wooden surrounds. This 'wooden fence post' would offer extra support and in combination with a stepped wooden approach to bark-chipped areas, some children with mobility problems would then be able to get into these soft surface areas more easily (fig. G.4. below).
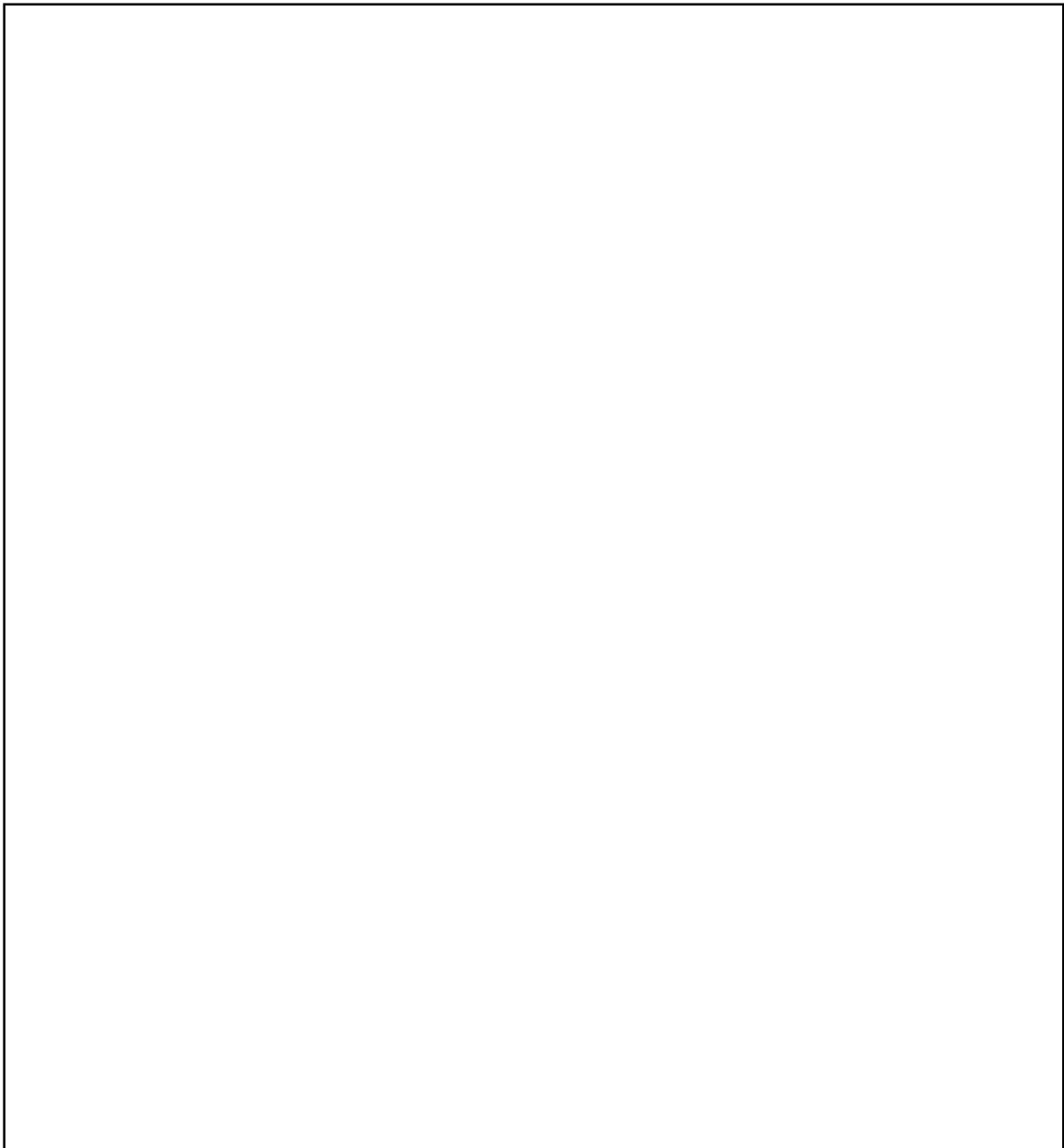
Fig. G.4. This design solution was very much the innovation of a young girl who thought that a short pole would be a good support for children wanting to get over the wooden kerbing around many play areas. Trials of her design are being put in place in Stirling region soon.

8.6. Slides

Child: I like somebody going with me.

Father: It's [getting on slides] *awkward, so that's why we don't really go down to the park.*
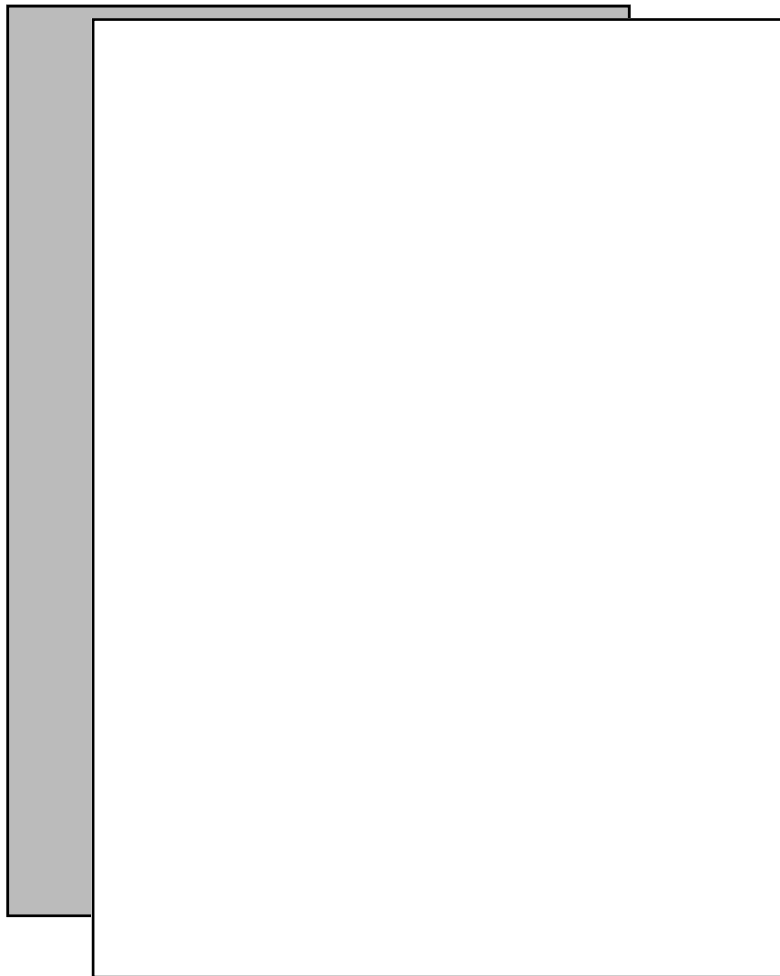
- - - - - - - -

Plate G.27. This slide has a ramped access to the top and is wide enough for two.

WORKSTATION - <u>Slides</u>

WE CHECKED THIS OUT

THE CHILDREN WOULD LIK**E A slide** THAT ...

- Has ease of access to the top of the slide (though not necessarily precluding alternative 'more challenging' routeways to the top)
- is wider for use by more than one person
- is longer. Longer slides were preferred (particularly those were spiral shaped)
- Tubular slides were given a preference although some children feared being in the dark for too long.
- had access by alternative routeways to the top (a 'dual-carriageway' type bridge option might be a possible solution) especially where wobbly bridges were the only way to the top of a slide
- a banked sloping access to the top was most desirable for wheelchair users

WE BRIEFLY DISCUSSED ...

- What problems there are with slides

SUGGESTING SOLUTIONS FOR...

- **Better access to the tops of slides**
  - □ RESPONSE: It was felt that sloping ground could be used to better effect to encourage access to the top of slides by wheelchair. Where a public space with a slope exists (as in Dunblane's 'Drying Green') there are possibilities for installing slides that could be fun for all. A variety of routeways to the top and down again could use the naturally occurring slope to best effect. Children use this area of grass for sliding and rolling already.

8.7. Seats, Swings, and Roundabouts

Child: They should get a baby seat but bigger.

Child: Well its a bit hard for me because I need to hold on really tight and the easiest one for me is a baby one [seat]*but I can't fit in them any more.*
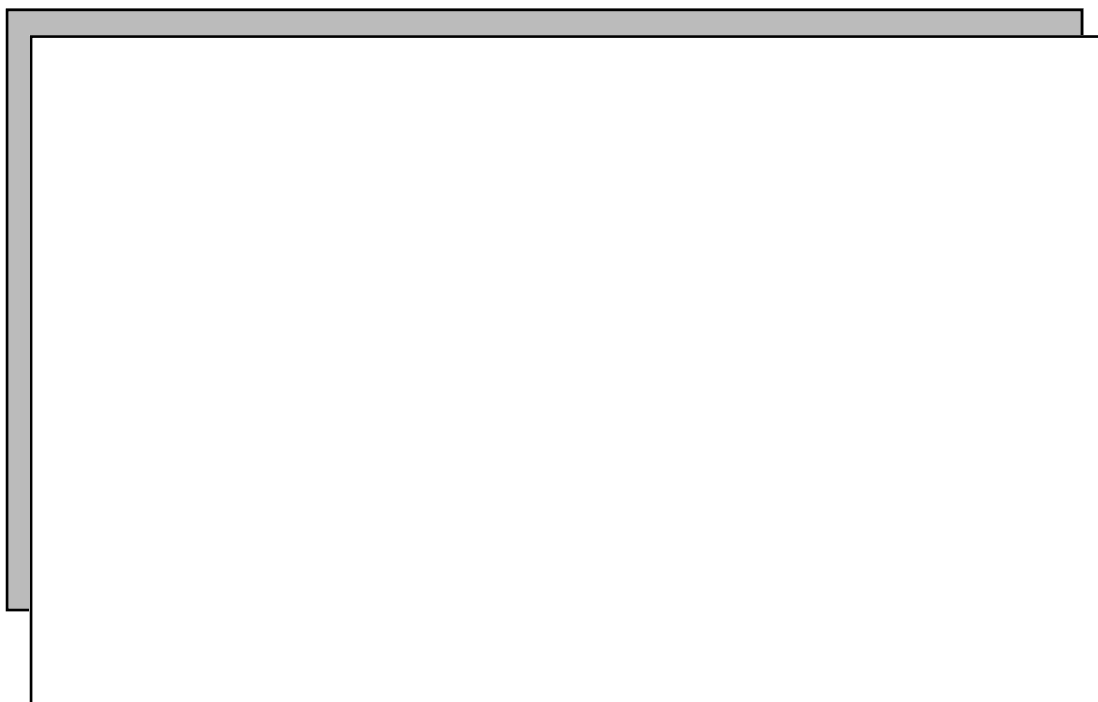
- - - - - - - -

Plate G.28. Communal swinging is a favourite and facilitates all body types in a safe contained unit. Scotland Yard Adventure Playground, Edinburgh. This is one solution to the problem of swing seats but this is a feature of a supervised play area which would need to be adapted for use in a public area.

WORKSTATION - Seats, Swings and Roundabouts

WE CHECKED THIS OUT

THE CHILDREN WOULD LIKE seats THAT ...

- are 'like baby seats' for swings but are larger on swings

- that have a 'strapping in' option on swings (and mobilis / roundabouts)

- that can accommodate two people on fast moving items of equipment

- that have back rests and hand grips for support (particularly on sand diggers)

WE LOOKED FOR ...

Seating that works for adults and children in the photographs

WE DISCUSSED ...

- Whether they thought we should include these solutions in the future

- Whether they have a swing in their back garden and what was it like

SUGGESTING SOLUTIONS FOR...

- **swinging as a group**
  - RESPONSE: We found one (or two) possible swing seats in the catalogues that could be used as a 'group swing'. This is probably worth including in some play park as an experiment. The use of a variety of tyre swings (some of which can be used by more than one child), traditional swings, and innovative swing locations (e.g. swinging concentrically) is accepted practice and is confirmed by the children and carers as having good 'play value'. Low-level 'flat' swings are possible solutions for carers needing to lift children onto swings. New design solutions are still worth investigating.

- **swinging in a secure seat**
  - RESPONSE: A few possible solutions are being discussed. One solution is the installation of swing seats specially designed for children with disabilities. These are available but would need to be installed without their straps. Carers could bring their own straps with them or they could be hired out from 'manned' toilets should they be close to hand. The cost of these seats is possibly prohibitive and there is a risk of vandalism simply because they are 'different'. It is worth having a trial of these with careful monitoring. Communication of the location of these specially installed seats could be advertised and communicated to parents. Similarly, special seats for 'Mobilis' roundabouts with a strapping-in facility for children with disabilities are now available. These could be made locally available for parents and other users.
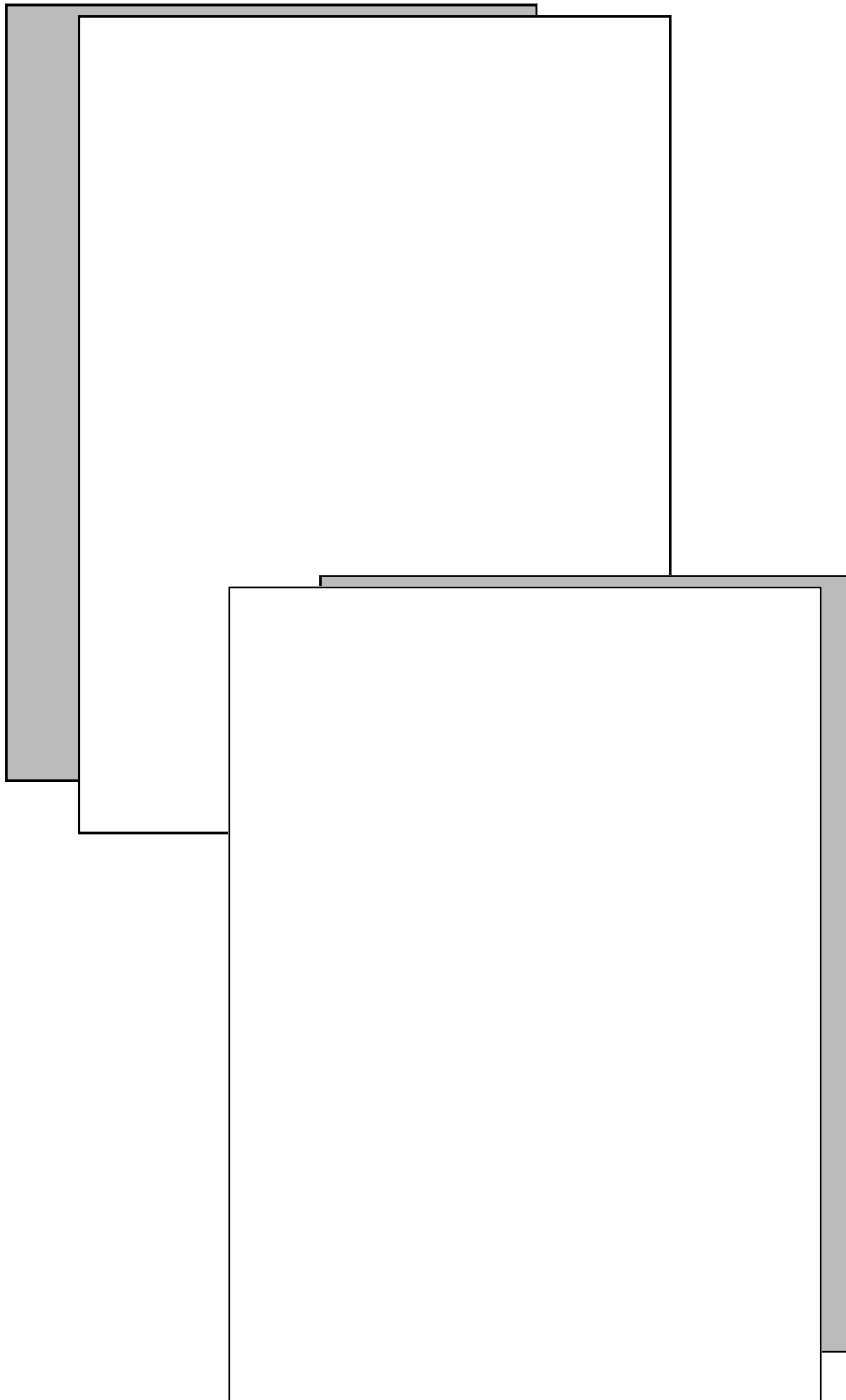
Plate G.29. (Above) A back garden seat commonly installed for children who need to be strapped in. Plate G.30. (Below) A 'home made' design that provides ease of access and is low level.

Plate G.31. This 'Bird's Nest' roundabout fulfilled the needs of many children for a secure seat, though getting some children into this would prove difficult if the child needs to be lifted.
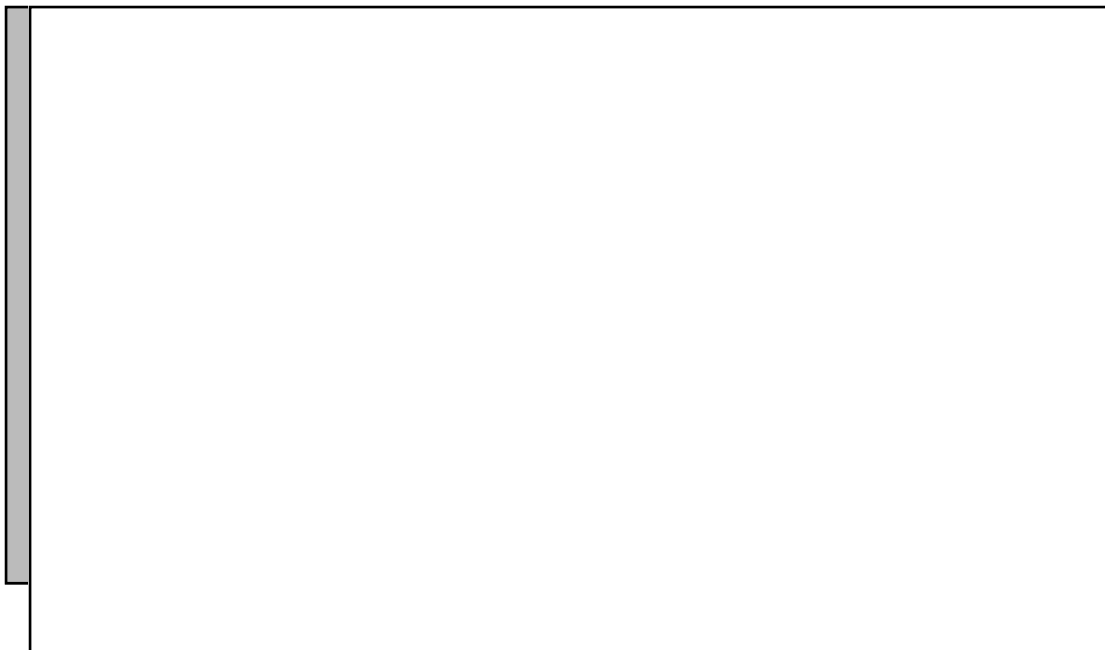

Plate G.32. The 'Flying Fox' (or aerial runway): a firm favourite. (See also below).

8.7. The Flying Fox

Child: Aye, they're brilliant .. I love them.

Child: Yeah ..... I think its great when you go upside down.

- - - - - - - -

WORKSTATION - The Flying Fox

WE CHECKED THIS OUT

THE CHILDREN LIKE the flying fox BECAUSE OF ...

- The sense of fast motion

- The challenge of doing it on your own

- The fun of getting a run with a parent

- The possibility of being hurled upside down

- The excitement

WE TRIED TO FIND OUT

- Whether the flying fox could be improved in any way - access / seating / room for two, etc

SUGGESTING SOLUTIONS / CREATING ALTERNATIVES...

- RESPONSE: One suggestion was that a number of flying foxes could be placed in sequence to develop a 'train of flight' around a play park.

8.8. Surfaces

Child: It's hard for me to get across because I am on my knees. They should do something about it.

Child: No, I wouldn't be able to get in there (bark chipped area with wooden kerbing) ....my walker wouldn't go over that step
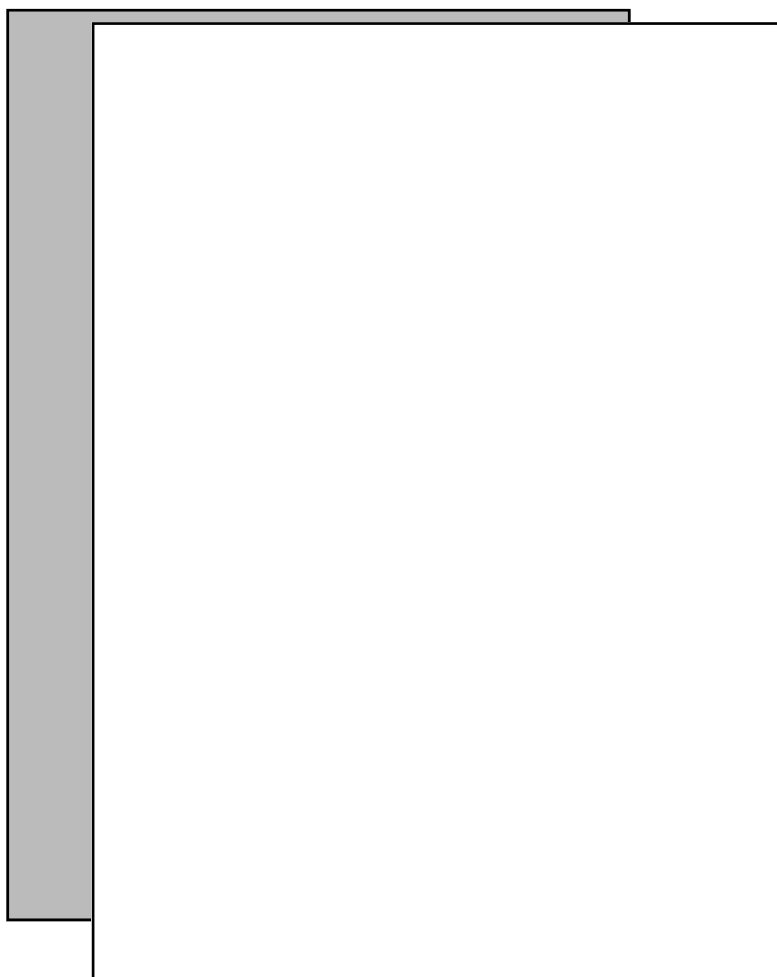
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Plate G.33. This boy points out the kerbing that causes access problems for children in walkers or for children who have mobility difficulties. This photograph was taken by a befriender who felt there could be a solution to this. Designers and children came up with some designs that are currently being trialled in selected play parks. (See fig. G.2, p90, and fig.G.3, 92).

WORKSTATION - <u>Surfaces</u>

WE CHECKED THIS OUT

the children had a preference for

- rubber matting where falls were likely or where the child was in a chair

- no loose surfacing materials for children who were disposed to taking things in their mouths or who were using wheelchairs to get around.

- bark chipping by other children who had no mobility problems.

WE DISCUSSED ...

- The different surfaces available and what works for them

SUGGESTING SOLUTIONS FOR...

- Ways of having a safe surface that also allows wheelchair / 'walker' access and access for children with mobility problems when approaching bark-chipped areas
- Ways of solving the 'dog grid' problem when getting into play areas (see plate below).
  - □ RESPONSES: See ***Handrails and Bridges***   (p98) where a solution to the first issue was explored.

Plate G.34. These grids are installed at the entrances to most play parks; they function to keep dogs out of play areas to prevent fouling. However it was discovered that the children in wheelchairs often get their wheels stuck in the gaps. A solution for this is the widening of the dog grid to allow wheelchairs to cross diagonally. This alteration to entrances has been instated in all play parks in Stirlingshire.

8.9. Climbing and Scrambling

Child: Yeah - I couldn't climb that bit - but I could climb the low netting.

- - - - - - - -

As climbing is such a central and all pervasive part of play in traditional and contemporary play parks and in the play forms of children everywhere, some more general comments are necessary to contextualise recommendations or analyses of the interviews.

Many children comments showed that they perceived their climbing abilities to be below 'par' or less than what they would like. While some of the children's comments refer to a recognition of a socially-ascribed lack of ability, other comments were more similar to 'mainstream' children's comments about their developmentally 'deficient' abilities that would presumably improve with practice and age. It should also be noted that many wheelchair users like getting out of the chair to use their upper body to get around. Their comments point out that low-level roping, railing and other fun climbing structures are possible design solutions. Some children would move through a piece of climbing equipment by dragging or drawing their legs along by using their arms. Perhaps designers need to embrace the use of verbs like 'drag' and 'draw' in thinking about alternative climbing frames, nets and equipment. As with all children, respondents experienced play as intertwined with the physical need for challenge and development as much as the desire for fun and association with others. The boundaries between physiotherapy, pleasure, adventure, and socialisation dissolve in many play contexts. At the same time, we might remember that the variety of forms of disability means that many children with disabilities may have little or no physical difficulty and, for them, contemporary playpark equipment design may be quite acceptable.

The variety of physical disabilities in users presents a particular challenge to designers of climbing equipment. Successful designs will address the physical and developmental needs of a variety of body types (some on wheels, some using 'walkers, some climbing freely, some crawling or rolling about) while also taking on board the other comments contained herein about context, adventure etc.. Designers need to consider facilitating *different* children

in the design and location of play park climbing equipment: the-child-with-less-than-average-muscle-strength, the-child-with-a-fear-of-heights, the-child-with-a-fear-of-enclosed-spaces, the-child-who-becomes-nervous-in-socially-'busy'-space, the-child-with-stronger-upper-body-than-lower, and so on.

As a general comment it can be said that children with disabilities *are children first;* in this respect they, like all children, want play parks that are challenging, fun and appropriate to their level of development. The use of the word 'access' for children with disabilities is perhaps somewhat misleading when discussing play areas because increased 'access' may remove the elements of challenge, adventure and fun necessary for the play event: a completely ramped play area may be accessible but discourages body movement outwith a wheelchair; a play area with all low-level equipment removes the opportunity for learning how to negotiate heights. A more appropriate term would be *'access to'* the 'play event' which can, of course, comprise of many things: fun, individual and group play, new physical and social challenges, interaction with seasonal changes, loose natural play things (like leaves or long grass), play with befriender or parent.

WORKSTATION   - <u>Climbing and Scrambling</u>

WE CHECKED THIS OUT

• Some children who use wheelchairs or walkers like to scramble and clamber outwith the chair

  or walker

• some children climb on their own / others like to be on equipment with adult support

• some children climb on 'standard equipment' with no difficulty

WE LOOKED FOR...

Climbing equipment that allows access for adults and children together.

WE DISCUSSED ...

• Where the climbing becomes frustrating (if it does) for the child or adult

SUGGESTIONS / SOLUTIONS

❑ RESPONSE: For some children needing some physical support in the lower body but who

  have the use of their upper body and perhaps limited use of their legs, the tubular netted

  tunnels were prohibitive as climbing apparatus. One suggestion was that these could be

  negotiated if they were left open on top or supplemented with alternative routeways across

  to the next platform / top of slide etc. The inclusion of more 'D handles' would increase

  access for these children especially at the top of slides. Bars that go horizontally across the

  point of access at the tops of slides can be difficult for some children as their bodies may not

  be as supple as other children's. Designers must also bear in mind that some adult carers

  will want to negotiate the equipment *with their children* in order to support them and get

  through a section that is challenging. If adults cannot get into or onto the equipment, then

  access for a supporting adult underneath climbing structures should be a consideration.

Summative Comments about Climbing Equipment

◇ Climbing Equipment should:

  • Provide for a variety of 'body-types'
  • Be incidental to many areas of the site
  • Have a variety of levels of challenge
  • Be coloured or 'coded' in a way that is suitable for the ages of the users (e.g. older
    children with disabilities will wish to use low level climbing equipment that is often
    thought to be suitable for younger children)
  • Have enough room for a supporting adult
  • Be fun for the adult carer as well
  • Be accessible while still fun, challenging and developmentally appropriate.

Fig. G.5. The inclusion of more 'D-Handles' at the top of ramps, corners on platforms, and at the tops of slides would enable some children to have greater independence on some structures.
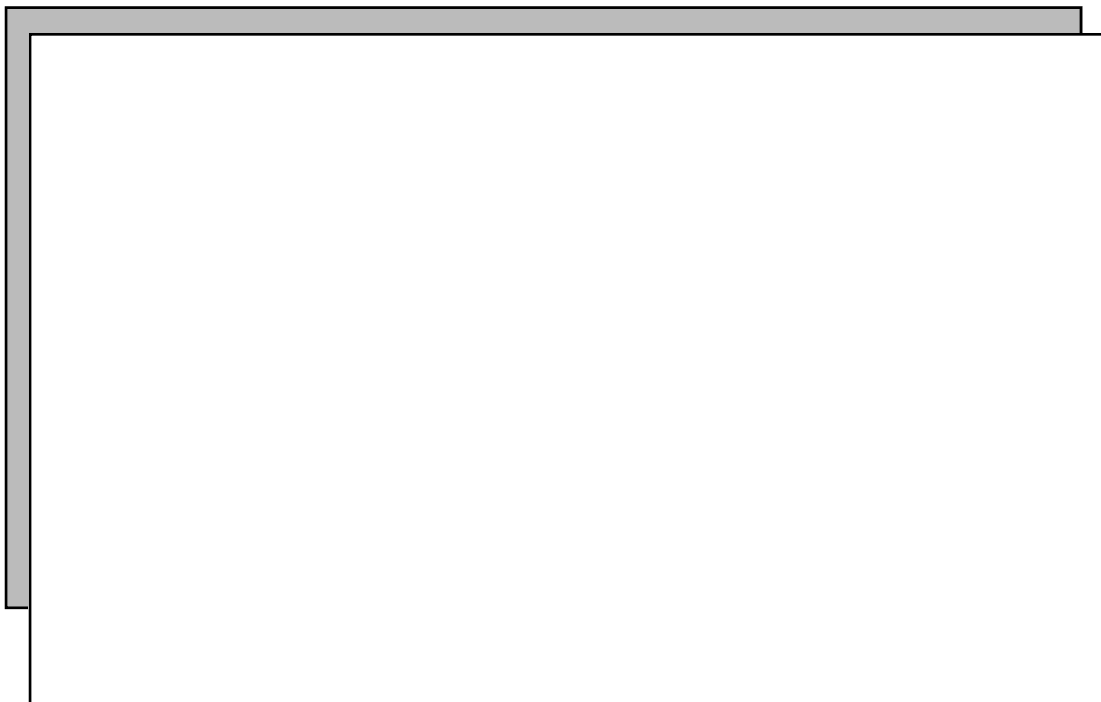

Plate G.35. Sometimes a child with mobility difficulties could use some more 'D handles' (as shown above) to enable ease of access onto a slide.

8.10. Back Garden Equipment

Mother   No I got the Council to put that up (a fence)*because I like to have girls enclosed because they have no sense of danger - they would just run into the road.*

Mother: I spend more than 300 pounds a year! All right (laughing) that's a lot of money!

- - - - - - - -

In this section the evidence gathered that shows the differences between the back garden and the play park is analysed. Monetary support from the Council and parents' own spending is indicative of parent's desire to enhance the play opportunities for children in their care. Further research would be necessary to discover if there are significant differences between the efforts of parents of children with disabilities and parents of other children in how they resource their back gardens with equipment. It is worth noting that the parents of children with disabilities we met are often concerned with the lack of social opportunities for social play and interaction especially if their child has a disorder that inhibits social interaction or results in behaviour that is seen as anti-social. These parents of children with disabilities were often concerned about the need for their child to interact with children who do not have disabilities as much as the need for their child to meet with children who have similar disabilities as themselves. The back garden is a significant site for addressing these needs as parents can have more control over the possibilities for visits by other children and from the locality or from other 'known families'. Some parents' roles in facilitating their child's play opportunities are not unlike the roles played by befrienders in other play settings. Some parents were critically reflective about their role as parent-playworker. While it was unclear from the research whether parents of children with disabilities generally need to be more active in this regard than other parents, one may surmise that it is likely to be so. Particularly noticeable was the prevalence of specialist swings for children that may need to be strapped in and / or supported by a moulded seat with a back rest. The absence of any public provision of swings for children with this need was doubtless the reason for the incidence of this.

What Parents Do to Enhance Back Gardens for Play?

- They buy equipment like slides, sand trays, paddling pools etc especially for the younger child.
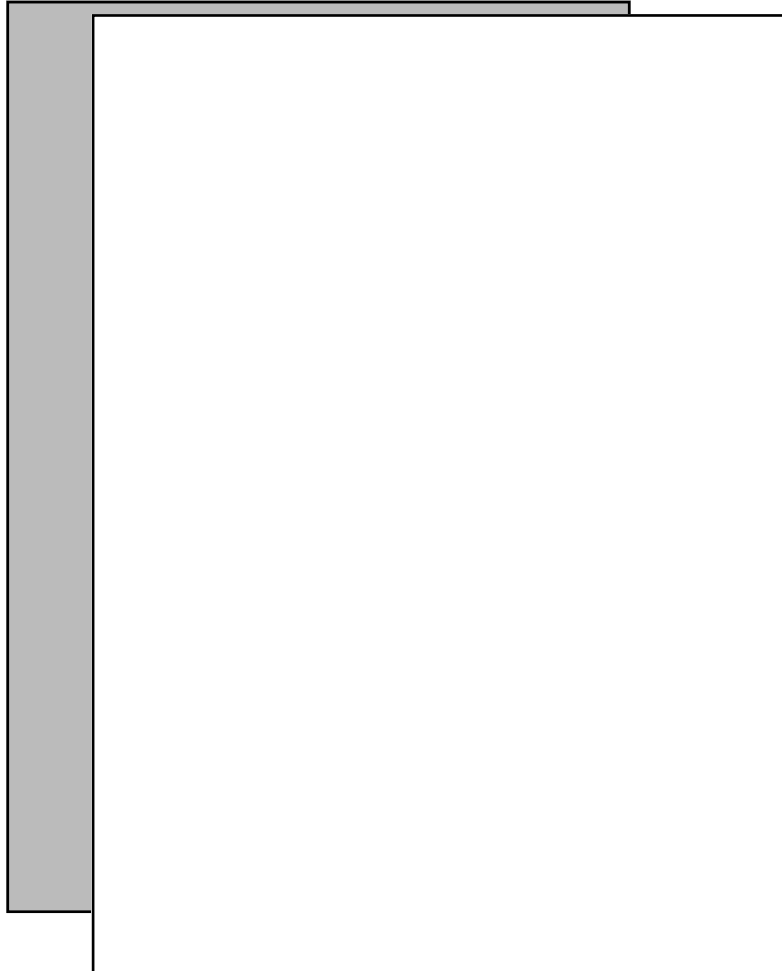- They build or buy huts, dens, or houses.

Plate G.36. Here a larger back garden can accommodate a garden shed that has been specially converted into a fort with ramped access and handrailing.

- They fence off dangerous areas.
- They provide areas of soft surfacing (like bark chipping)
- They use grants from the Council to install ramps and paths.
- They install equipment adapted for use by children with disabilities bought from catalogues.
- They spend up to £400 pounds a year maintaining and installing equipment.
- They invite other children around.
- They try to make their back gardens 'fool proof'.
- They make changes to their back garden environment that may 'go unnoticed' by the children themselves and visitors while yet addressing their specific needs.
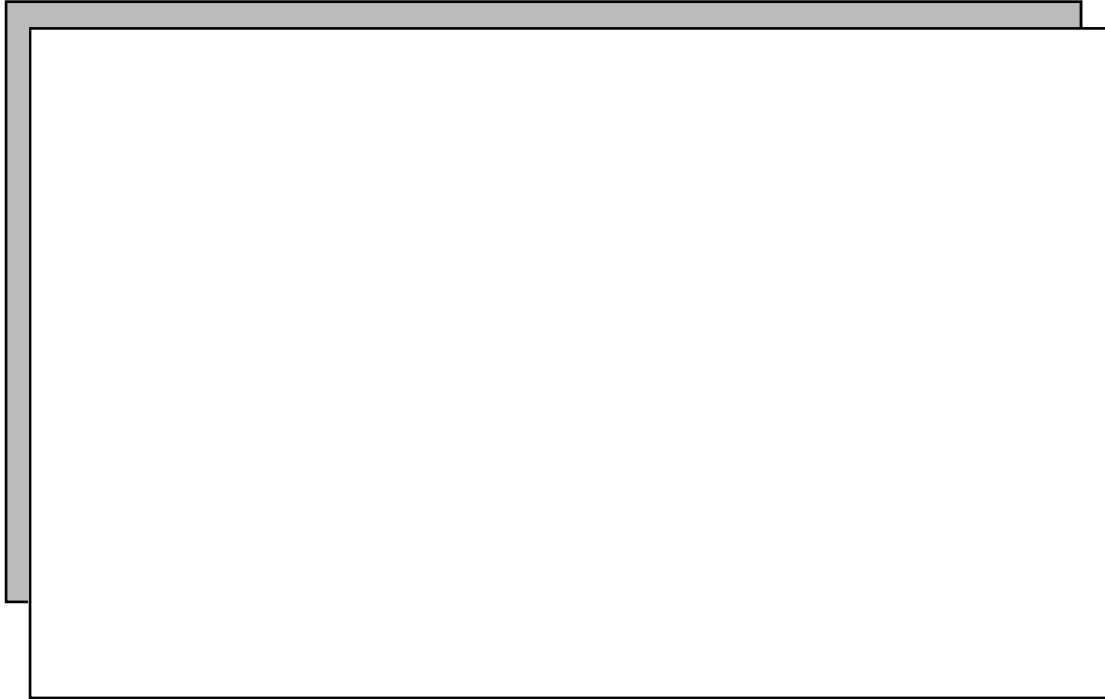
Plate G.37. This boy who loves football draws the author's attention to a sign attached to the fence of a shared garden that backs onto some eight other houses (below).
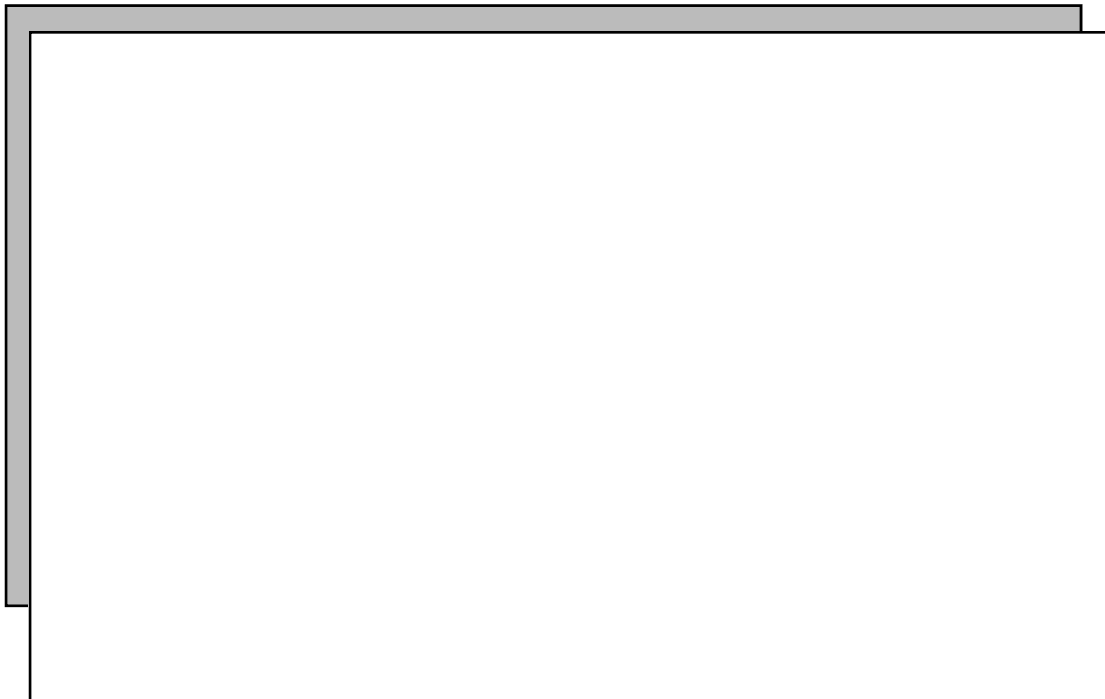
Plate G.38. The story went that a neighbour had complained about the marks being left in the grass as a result of the boy's wheelchair leaving the paths. The boy reluctantly kept to the paths and played football and other games in his smaller private back yard (Plates below) though this was not a solution he or his family liked.
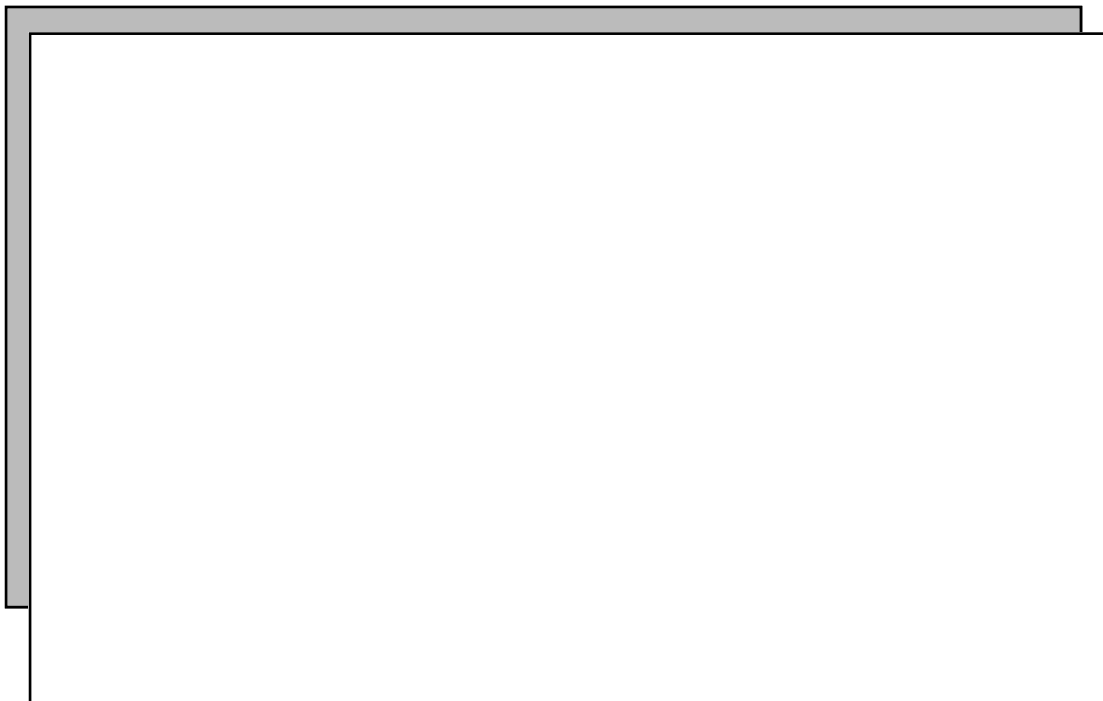
Plates G.39. and G.40. (Above) Here the hard surfacing and goal mouth equipment provided a solution for the boy's desire to play his favourite game despite it being in a small back yard.

WORKSTATION - <u>Back Garden Equipment</u>

WE CHECKED THIS OUT

some OF THE CHILDREN HAVE BACK GARDENS THAT HAVE

- slides, sand trays, paddling pools etc especially for the younger child.
- fences that keep them well 'bounded'
- areas of soft surfacing (like bark chipping)
- ramps and paths.
- specialised swings and other equipment .
- dens and special places

some OF THE parents

- invite other children around regularly.
- try to make their back gardens 'fool proof'.
- make changes to their back garden environment that are designed to 'go unnoticed' by the children themselves and visitors while yet addressing their specific needs

WE TRIED TO FIND OUT

- What the children (adults) like about their back gardens
- the comparisons between play parks and public play areas
- RESPONSE: While we found that this issue needed more time for a proper analysis we have made some comments that may seem intuitive rather than empirical. Most noticeable was the perception that the play park had something intangible on offer children when compared to their back garden in all cases. It seems that the trip to the public space was a kind of adventure, an escape from the ordinary, the familiarity of the back garden. It appeared that the child's desire to explore beyond the home was facilitated by both the journey to the play park and the experiences on offer there. It was my impression that this was partly to do with the celebratory nature of a trip to the park with one's friends. Often the trip would be punctuated with stop-offs at the shop or the ice cream van, the chance meeting with a local dog, and so on. As children's perceptions of dangers may get crowded with parents' increase in fears for their safety compounded with the media's incessant bantering about the same fears since the Jamie Bolger incident, one may hope that play parks can provide a continued safe haven for the majority of children whether under the supervision of their parents, their peers, passing locals or on their own. Yet, the back gardens I encountered were full of rich possibilities for play:
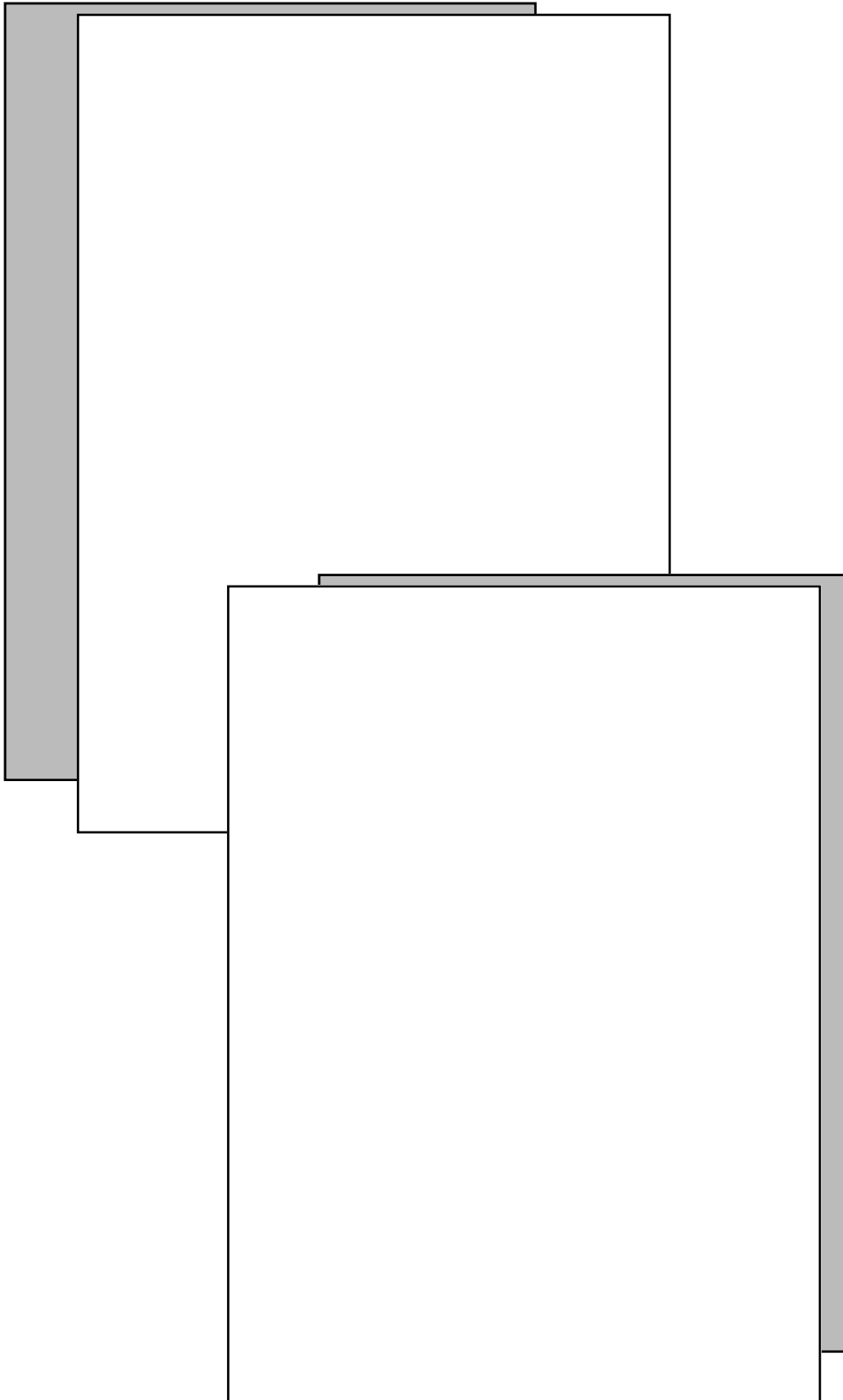
Plates G.41. and G.42. This girl showed me some 'food' she is preparing (below) for her imaginary friend 'Blue' who lives in her attic and hides in 'Blue's Hole' in the shrubbery in her back garden.

8.11. Paying for Play

Mother: Adventure playgrounds are advertised usually ... you think 'I need to try that one'. I think we have tried a fair amount of them actually.

Mother: Well, we will have seen it advertised and think we will have to try that

---

Mother: Even Burger Kings adventure playground is quite nice - its quite nice having that sort of thing within an eating area you know

- - - - - - - -

As noted with the spending on back garden equipment, there may be differences between how much parents of children with disabilities and other parents spend on visits to commercial play centres. It may be analysed as yet another response by parents of children with disabilities to a perceived need for greater supported opportunities for play for their children. Commercial play centres may be suitable for the purposes of these parents because of their concern for the social interaction difficulties experienced by their child. Some commercial play centres may provide the chance for an adult to have 'quality time' with their child in an environment that has many alternatives for stimulation: animals, tractor rides, as well as play equipment. Some commercial play centres are 'specially geared' for children with disabilities (like Disney) and are attractive for that reason.

The role of the parent (or befriender) in visiting the play park was seen by parents and children as central to the facilitation of enjoyable play experiences. In some cases, where the parents were unable to get out and about (because of lack of transport or because of a disability of their own), the role of the befriender, or other sibling, in enabling the children to get to the local play park, commercial play centres, specialised play parks, play events, and country parks was seen as crucial to the play opportunities for the child. Parents who were more active in enabling their child to visit play areas enacted a nomadic approach to visiting play parks, commercial play areas, and specialist play events. These weekend trips may be made in the car to destinations requiring up to a one hour journey (two hour round trip). In this light, we can conceptualise the public play area as the first local and well-visited play

space that gets regular use. For children with no back garden, a badly equipped back garden, or with no one to enable their visits to farther-flung play areas, the public play area may be providing a vital play space. Beyond the local play park, some children are finding an increasingly diverse range of play spaces opening up for then: play areas attached to public houses and burger joints, indoor play areas and soft play areas, leisure pools with associated water slides, etc.. We may look to the need for public play areas to take on board the need to 'compete' with these other spaces in the commercialisation of play for children in the future. The attractiveness of public play areas will have to be competitive with these other play spaces. The 'free' access of public play areas may be a public value worth 'advertising' in this light. The importance of the opportunity for local children, their carers, parents, and others to convene in 'their' local play area is of importance too. Ways of generating ownership, responsibility for, and shared 'sense of place', in the public play park may be crucial to public play provision. Maintaining and regenerating a locally distinctive appreciation for these public spaces can only enhance their value. It is also the case that, along with school grounds and country parks, that they are one of the few places that are collectively owned by the public as increases in demands for space for housing, industry, and roads increases. With the increasing desire for parents to know where their children are and be assured of their safety, the public play park can provide a locally-based environment of adventure, independent activity and public play unmatched by anything the commercial centre can offer. From the child's point of view it is often the first or the only local place that children (whether with or without disabilities) can access independently of adults.

WORKSTATION - <u>Paying for Play</u>

WE CHECKED THIS OUT

Children and adults are happy to pay to get into some play centres (Ruskie Farm,, the swimming pool, the national deer centre, burger king's play area, soft play centres) because of

- The expectation of 'something different'
- The expectation that there will be more to do than if you visit the public play area - more adventure, themed play areas, shops and food, extra attractions.
- The desire on the part of the carer to go somewhere new.
- The attractiveness of the advertisements.

• The 'added value' aspects: eg the availability of hot food like burgers, the provision of separate adult coffee bars while the child plays in a 'safe' environment as is the case with 'soft play' areas.

WE TRIED TO FIND OUT ...

   • What the differences are between their local play park and these places

WE LOOKED FOR SOLUTIONS FOR...

   • making the local play park more attractive if they think it needs to be made so.

   ▫ RESPONSE: Please consult the commentary on the issues relating to 'The Back Garden'
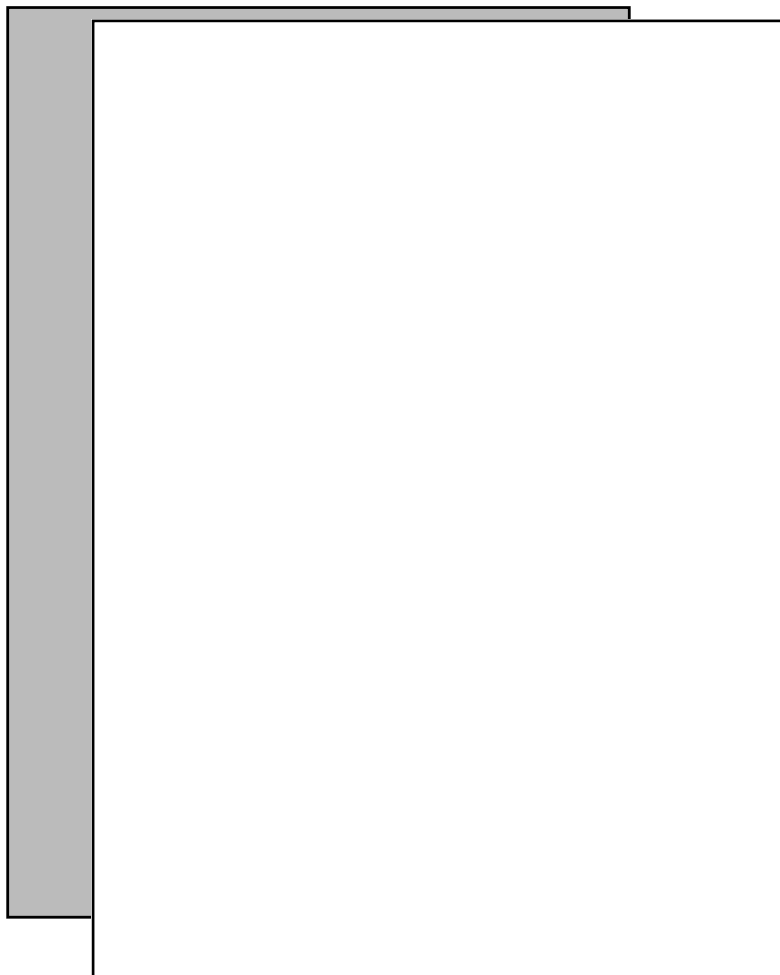
Plate G.43. Here some children and their befrienders get out and about in a pony and trap in an 'open farm' centre.

8.12. Dens, Huts, Willow Houses, Tree houses, Trees and Plants

Greg: What's nice about being up high in trees?

Child: You can see what other people can't see.

Child: I like to go underneath trees

Greg: Would you like to see more trees near playparks?

Child: Yeah

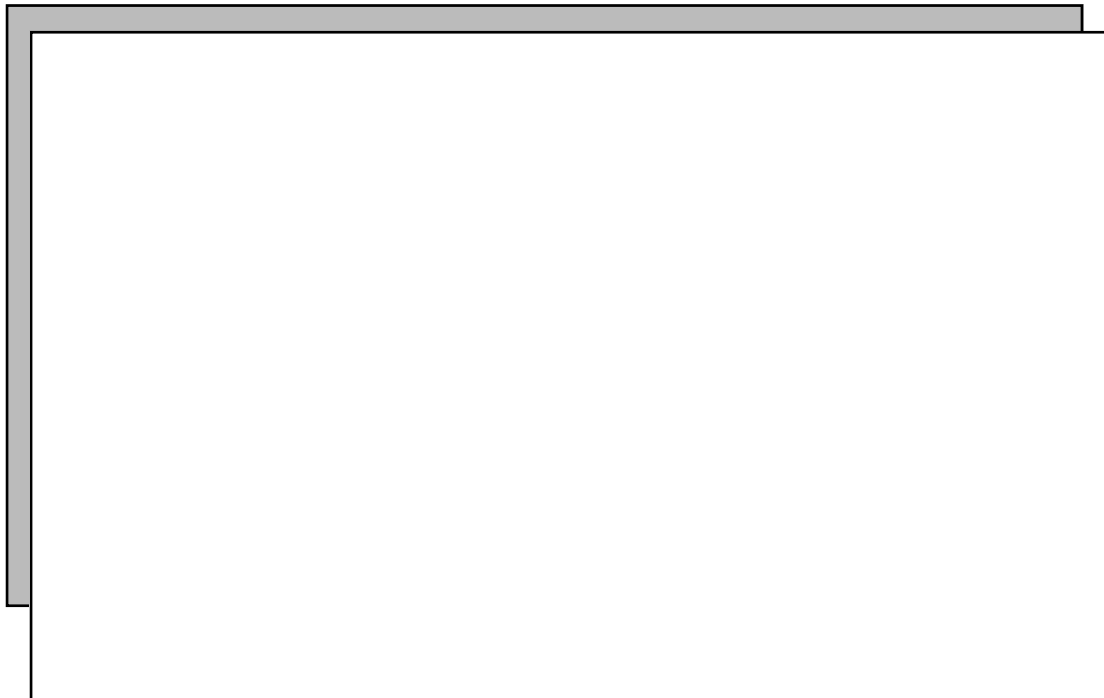*Mother: He loves trees.... he loves touching and feeling them.*

Plate G.44. Boy feeling the leaves of the tree in his garden.

Child: I would love a treehouse

Mother: He loves hiding in the bushes.

Child: Yeah, he loved it.... I was just looking about and he threw some straw and it went down my back.

Child:Yeah we just get some chairs through there and we get covers and put them

over them in the back garden.

Child: He loves pulling leaves to bits.

Carer: He would put his hand out to touch.

Child: The background is nice because you can hide inside all the trees.

Mother   Do you like tree houses?

Child: Yeah - I have always wanted one -

Greg: And when you are in there you sit on your own and you shoot the traffic with your

guns.
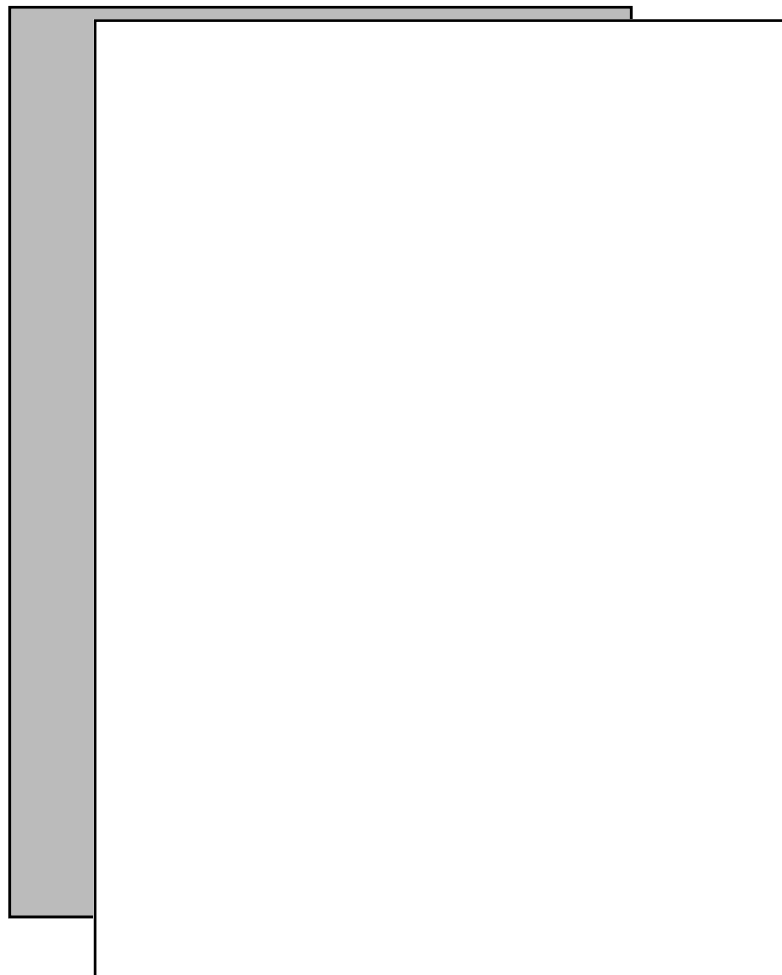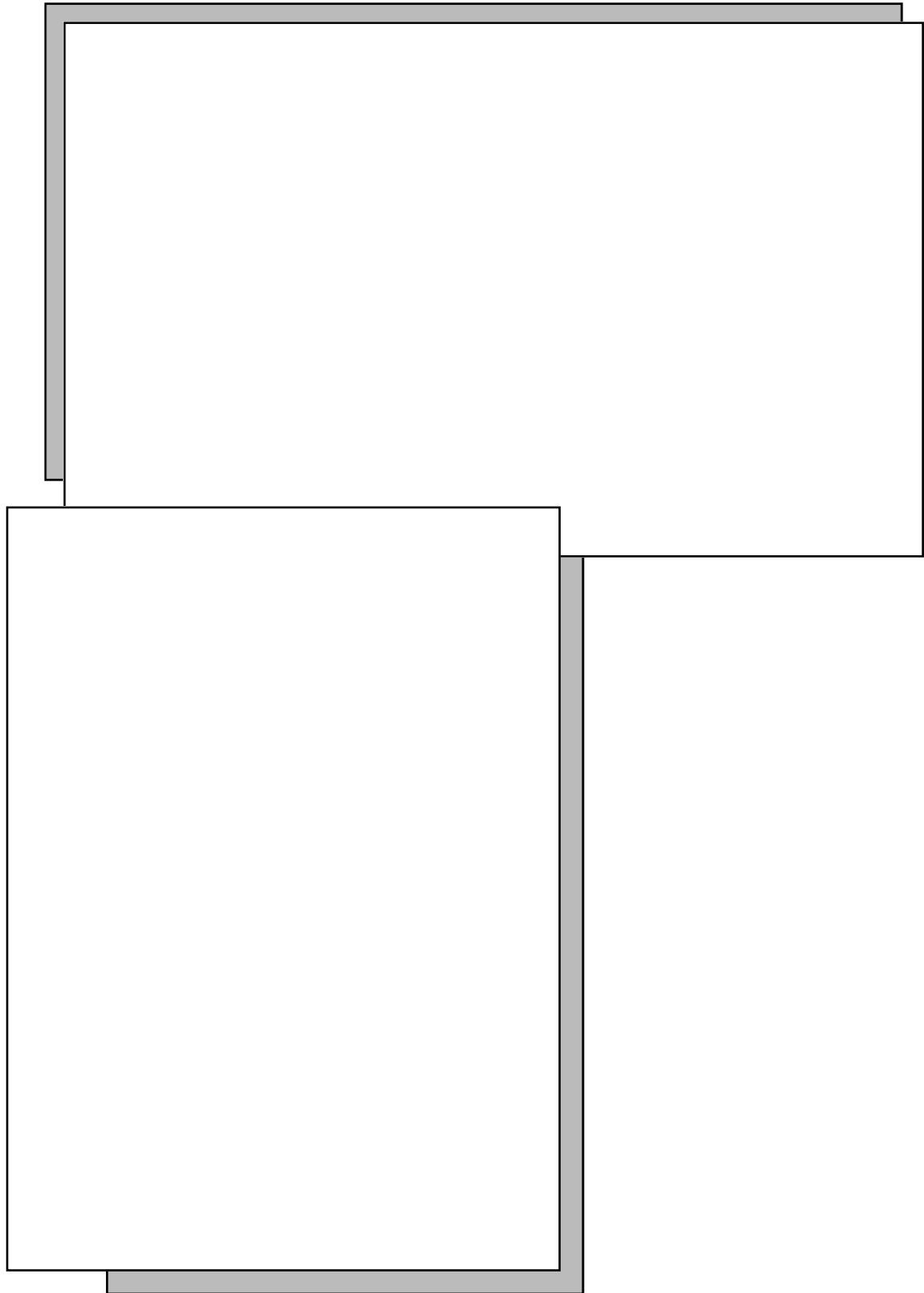
Plate G.45. Boy in his back garden den which is constructed out of old furniture and other loose, found objects.

Child: I'd like to go in the willow hut. It is like in the stone age - like in the Flintstones.

Plates G.46 & G.47. An example of a new innovation in playground design. Here a live willow structure invites exploration and fantasy play in a public play area in Stirlingshire.

Many of the respondents referred to the building of dens, huts and gang houses in natural settings. While most of this activity is conducted by boys, it is not unremittingly so. Girls too used natural settings for social and play purposes. The role of this activity has been analysed by other researchers. Here it is sufficient to say that this kind of activity can provide a way of connecting children to their natural and local environment. The consequences for their attitude to the locality can be far-reaching. Vivid memories of this kid of activity has been shown to be influential in motivating adults in later life towards many kinds of activism for the environment and in their career choices. For our purposes here we can acknowledge some of the necessary components of a 'good' den:

Structural Components and Location

It has to have more than one entrance; its good if you can see out and others can't see in; it is a place where children bring in objects for fantasy play; it is good if it is hard to find and is camouflaged in some way; it is good if there is something to sit on and if there is some form of 'roof' protection. Ideally they are usually constructed in 'wild' or wooded environments. Bushes are useful for their construction. Sometimes dens are constructed inside the house.

Access and Exit

Sometimes there are rules about who can get in. These rules may be defined by age or gender on occasion. Mostly the children know each other well. Often their parents are unaware of the existence of these places even when they are in the back garden. A secret routeway as a means of 'escape' is seen as good.

Activities Undertaken in Huts

These included: chatting; planning events; imaginary play involving imaginary characters; observing others; 'spying'; mock battles with others in other gang huts; the raiding of others sites; the 'destruction' of other den sites; playing with the loose materials found in and around the site; designing modifications and building other gang huts; bringing in 'found items' (e.g. old soft furnishings, or wood) for additional features in the den.

In line with the children's discussions about dens they noted preferences for photographs with trees, green planting, and long and short grass. They liked the photographs of tree houses and those with specially constructed 'willow huts'. Children often directed me to the planted borders of playparks especially if there was substantial amounts of trees and bushes.
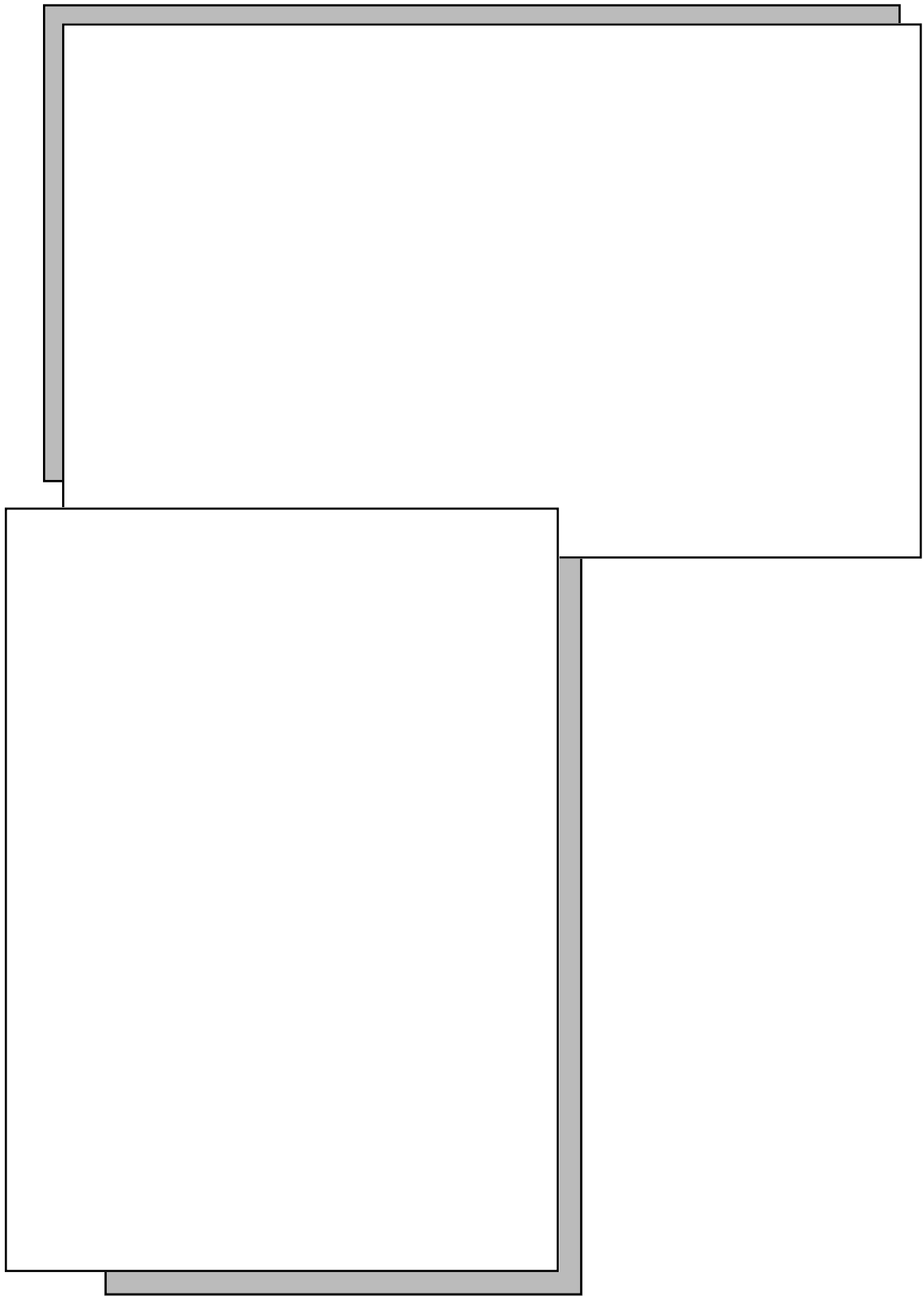
Plates G.48 & G.49. These brothers showed me the 'routeways' and dens they had created in an area peripheral to a play park. They showed an intimate knowledge of some seasonal features of some of the plants: their berries, fruits, seeds, etc..

WORKSTATION - <u>Dens, Huts, Willow Houses, Tree houses, Trees and Plants</u>
WE CHECKED THIS OUT ...

1. THE CHILDREN LIKE TO PLAY IN DENS OR GANG HUTS

2. A GOOD GANG HUT OR DEN TENDS TO HAVE

- more than one entrance / exit

- something to sit on

- some form of 'roof' protection

- ways of seeing out but not being seen

- wood, trees, or bushes in the construction

- rules about who gets in

Some children discussed doing these things in gang huts:

- chat, plan, imagine, 'spy' on people, organise 'mock battles', change their gang hut by adding things or bringing in things to play with, plan 'raids' on other people's huts**.**

SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS FOR...

- **Their desire to have dens, hut building, tree houses, and willow huts etc in play parks.**
  - RESPONSE: See workstation ***Perception and Awareness of Danger***   for a fuller treatment of the possibilities here. The question of balance between 'privately' defined spaces (like 'gang huts') and public space (as some feel the play area should be is an interesting conundrum. Encouraging a group activity that uses territoriality to define the space was questioned as appropriate for a play area. Encouraging the creating of 'Gang Huts' may be detrimental to the access of all. Some children noted that a gang hut is best placed in a back garden *which acknowledges the need for a more private space* that is less vulnerable to use by 'strange' others. Yet the experience of Scotland Yard is that (under adult supervision) a place can be created that is shared *and* owned by all and that has many features that are created by children themselves. One solution is to encourage artists to help with developing a sense of ownership in play areas by having them work with local children to install features that could be used as gang huts but that would not be permanent features. In this way a sense of ownership and change could be built into the ever-changing

cultural space of the local play park where children grow, mature and move on to use other places for sociability. Other types of equipment that may serve the social functions of the 'den' include raised platforms that can accommodate loose seating (cushions) and 'crow's nest' type structures with a laddered access. The installation of 'pigeon holes' and shelving may encourage children to bring in other loose objects in their imaginative play in play parks. Further attempts at creating design solutions for the inclusion of darker, more secluded places for play in public play areas may still be a worthwhile experiment.

Fig. G.6. This drawing by one of the children shows the sense of homeliness and high ownership associated with den and hut building: he labels his drawing 'my garden' to define his preferred location of a den and defines it as 'Home Sweet Home'. The presence of a friend rather than a stranger is significant as well. Nabhan and Trimble (1994, pp7-10) give a good discussion on the psychological interpretations of aspects of children's den construction behaviour.

<div align="center">

SECTION D
CONCLUSIONS

</div>

9. RE-INTERPRETATIONS

The following 'first level findings' of the research have been categorised into these five sections:

- **About the general use of play areas**
- **Practical design solutions**
- **The role of carers**
- **The location of the public play area**
- **Reflexive discoveries**

These sections deal with findings about the general use of play areas by children and their carers; findings that led to practical 'design solutions' for the local authority; findings about the role of carers (parents, befrienders, play workers) in supporting children with disabilities' play; findings about the context of the public play area when compared with commercial centres and the back garden; findings that are reflexive discoveries that resulted from the process of attempting this kind of research in the first place. Further analysis is of the research is found in the main text in chapter 18.

We have dealt with many of the issues relating to each so far in chapter 8. Some summative comments may be of use to readers at this point however. We can take these four categories in turn:

9.1. About the General Use of Play Areas

The most significant finding is perhaps a general one: we discovered that *children with disabilities are regular users of their local public play environments even when there are few or no adaptations in place to enable them to access equipment.* This occurs most often when the parents or carers of the children are on hand to make the necessary effort to lift the child, to carry the child between equipment, to take the child to the local park or facilitate their child in the appropriate way. This 'scaffolding' or 'bridging' activity of parents or carers also take the form of the creation of a supportive play environment by the ways in

which they gather or allow friends to play with their child, the way in which they encourage and praise their child or the way in which they actively play with their child as a peer would when friends are less easily found or when the child has difficulty finding friends that understand her/his condition. Further discussion of the significance of the role of carers, play workers (befrienders) and other siblings is dealt with hereunder. However the significance we wish to draw out here is that *public access play areas can be the most regularly visited, locally situated, safe play areas for children with disabilities.* That these places have no admission fee and do not require the use of a car to get there are also significant in considering the future provision of sustainable play experiences for all especially in rural Scotland. It is the agreement of the steering committee that making pragmatic, locally sensitive, and targeted changes to the play areas already in situ is by far the best approach to take in making a positive difference to the lives of children with disabilities in the region. By taking on board and actively piloting the suggested changes that emerged from the discovery process of this action-research approach, the Council will make a distinct difference to these children's lives and will undoubtedly enhance public play provision for all in doing so too. An obvious conclusion of continuing to opt for this approach to play provision is that it will require continued communication with the families that use (or are prospective users) of local play parks as provisions are made and as the children move around from place to place, grow up and look for new play challenges. This ongoing community-oriented approach to play provision is in line with the work practices and work culture already in place in the Children's Services division in Stirling Council. Such an attitude to the public not only makes such this kind of provision possible but is necessary for its success.

9.2. Practical Design Solutions

These are perhaps the most interesting findings for readers interested in practical outcomes from research. They are also the locally significant findings for Stirling Council who discovered some new innovative ways of 'reducing barriers' to children's access to public play areas. These have been illustrated in the analysis in chapter 8. As 'design solutions' they may not be the 'solution' to outdoor public play for children with disabilities; neither is this research the only way forward in 'solving' the needs of children with disabilities for participation.

9.3. The Role of Carers

In line with Widdows (1997), we found that parents and carers were agreed on the importance of *inclusive* play opportunities for children with disabilities. Their main expression of this agreement was in the efforts that they make to have their child included and participating in play in their own gardens and in public play parks. They felt that their children should have opportunities for play in public places in inclusive settings. Public play park settings could, however, provide a better resource if some creative planning and design solutions were employed (as is outlined later). Inclusive play for all abilities makes the notions of 'disability' visible in ways that can change disabling cultures that still persist. Public inclusive play experiences are also seen as strategically important in dissolving traditional concepts of children with disabilities having '*special* needs' and serve to help revise ideas of what counts as normal.

Parents were regarded by their children with many of the attributes associated with a 'child friend'. Parents performed the role of another child on the playground not just when occasions demanded intimate support or help, but when a 'friend' was needed for cooperative play (as in hide and seek). Their actions functioned to demonstrate suitable roles other siblings and neighbouring children might adopt while also helping to maintain the play event. Socially, some parents were seen to be 'filling a gap' as a play friend for their children. Yet others convened, supported, or allowed neighbouring children into the garden where (where play equipment was at hand). Other parents created 'play events' by gathering children together to 'go to the shop' or visit a more distant play park by car. As gate keepers and facilitators of their children's play, parents played a vital role. If the children themselves were not active in gathering friends round, the parent's job was to do this for them. When this role was not being fulfilled by a parent, it was sometimes filled by another sibling. In all but one case did we find children in a situation where they were not meeting with other children of going on outings. In this case, the role of the befriender was even more important as they provided a link to another social scene, a different 'play world' at least once a month.

Parents were generally active in creating various social networks for their children, and in allowing their children to create and be involved in their own networks. They were motivated, probably more than other parents, to have groups of children around their homes so that the

children with disabilities could have friendships with other 'able-bodied' children. There is also the presumption that the children would benefit from friendships with other children 'like themselves' through events and organisations like befriending service of *Playplus*.

Siblings of the children with disabilities provided opportunities for inclusive play in public play parks. Brothers and sisters provided access to play areas by bringing them to parks, helping them access equipment, challenging them to engage in new play experiences and sometimes stretching their '(dis)abled' sibling to try things in ways their parents would not or could not have. They are the unseen (and unpaid) carers of many of these children.

Children with disabilities still experienced exclusion from more 'normal' play experiences for a number of typical factors (listed here). We might bear in mind that children generally may be excluded for similar reasons and that the disability was but a compounding factor:

- people were not always on hand to bring them to a play park
- they were considered unable to negotiate traffic or social dangers (like strangers)
- the play park provided no worthwhile equipment with which they could play
- other children did not make regular visits to their home because of experiences of (or fear of) bullying
- the befriending services only came once a month
- the parent / carer had some form of disability themselves or was busy at work.
- The great amount of extra effort involved in getting these children participating in play (e.g. lifting and strapping into swings) prevented fuller inclusion.
- lack of transport or information to avail of services or visit key sites that were specially adapted to their needs.

Parents' Positive Roles in Play Behaviour

- Acting as a playworker in play settings.
- Convening peer groups for play in the back garden or in the local play park.
- Developing strategies for play with the children.
- Developing strategies for keeping safe from strangers and crossing the road.
- Developing networks of parents to be 'on hand' or to 'keep an eye out' for the children.
- Buying equipment for the back garden.

- Adapting or constructing their own play equipment.
- Getting other help from befriending services or from other relations and siblings.
- Transporting the child/children to other play settings often at distances where suitable equipment was available.
- Playing with their child 'as a friend'.
- Providing a range of help and support that demonstrated a central interdependence mixed with independence between child and adult. The motivation was sometimes expressed as helping the child to move from dependence to independence in the challenges faced in play: scaffolding their child onto equipment, enabling access over barriers, being very close at hand, watching at more of a distance, 'letting go' and allowing more independent play, encouraging their child towards greater challenges all the time, celebrating and helping self esteem through praise, enabling their child to 'go it alone'.

These findings should reaffirm Stirling Council's commitment to the befriending service they provide. Befrienders are some children's life line in facilitating their mobility to places for play and in supporting and encouraging their play when their adults carers are lacking the time or the access to transport.

9.4. The Location of the Public Play Area

In the discussions about the issues relating to 'The Back Garden' and 'Paying for Play' we have reviewed the findings about the context of the public play area when compared to the back garden or commercial centres. Some summative comments would be to note that the public play park should 'stand its ground' in the rise in opportunities for children to get out and about with their carers and families to commercial centres. The visit to the zoo, the open farm, and the indoor soft play area are now well-established features of the landscape of play places available to children these days. Children do go to these places but not to the exclusion of the local play park by any means; *children still go to the play park most often when compared to their frequency of visit these other places.*

All the while we must remember that for those who are lucky enough to have a garden, it is likely to become an increasingly more important site for children's play as people get more anxious about the need to keep an eye on their children; this may be more especially true for families with children with disabilities. The doorstep and the local street were once the most

regularly visited places for play for children, but the contemporary thinking is that with the onset of traffic and the rise in fears for children's safety, children are encouraged into supervised settings more and more (Children's Play Council, 1997). This may have been more especially true for children with disabilities because of attitudes to their care and needs. We certainly found that parents' resourcing of these areas gave witness to the importance of the back garden to their children's play experiences but further research will need to confirm whether this is a particular feature of this social subgroup or a feature of back gardens of families more generally in a UK context. Within this context the public play park will probably be an increasingly more important site for children's *public* play unless access to a diversity of other spaces is maintained or restored. It will continue to be the most likely place for children to visit on foot outside of the immediate street scene outside their home (which is becoming increasingly more congested with traffic). The continued provision of places in the public domain for children's play gives children the 'public right' to be able to get there safely. It witnesses to the need for children's public street life to be met in terms of road safety, speed limits, and street crossings. That they should be able to continue to get to play parks without the help and supervision of their parents will be a test of community attitudes to child safety and the importance of their ability to be independently mobile.

The Local Street

Wheway and Millward's finding (1997) that 'What is important for children is to be able to move freely around their physical and social environment and have a variety of interactions at different locations' puts an even greater onus on local authorities to look beyond play provision in designated parks. While they should continue to enhance public play parks with children with disabilities in mind, it will also be necessary to encourage the visibility of disability (and children generally) on the local street. Reducing speed limits to 20mph in up to 80% of housing estates and the provision of 'home zones' (Children' Play Council, 1997; see also p?) will be important play policy initiatives in making this a reality.

The local public play park is potentially providing a distinct context for more independent forms of activity than that the activities afforded by the back garden or the family day trip to a commercial play centre. While independent play in a public place is one of these activities, the others must not be ignored: the activities of walking to the park, meeting locals, meeting

peers from other socio-economic backgrounds, dealing with bullying, finding out about dangers, traffic, and vandalism which are the bread and butter of many children's learning and development. In the light of the increase in child-minding and the escorting of children to and from organised and paid for activities like Scouts, ballet, and the like, the public play park can be one of the few child-friendly public havens that are left. It is also worth mentioning that it has been noticed that an increasing number of fathers are frequenting play parks with their children. With more 'estranged fathers' and increasing numbers of children in families with a past history of divorce, play parks are also providing one 'neutral territory' to visit when children spend time with parents they meet irregularly.

9.5. Reflexive Discoveries

Some insights invariable emerge from attempting this kind of research for the researcher and those working closely with him or her. For my part I can say I was deeply challenged by the prospect of visiting the homes of some of these children. It required that I had to be prepared to communicate with a variety of age ranges, cultural backgrounds, and a diversity of 'disabled identities' that were ever present to me in the form of child bodies of a variety of shapes sizes and abilities. In that this effected their ability to communicate with me I often struggled to find their voice amid the advocacy being offered to me on their behalf by their befrienders, parents and so on. I often felt that the lack of ability was in me or in my methods. I will be the first to admit that none of the methods we used were fool proof. There are never any guarantees that any 'truth' about children's experiences of public play has made it into this text. One can only hope that the inclusion of certain impressions, and selected photographs may help the reader to make their own opinions about the situation.

As main author, I also found that instead of using a binary notion of 'dependence versus independence' as a way to look at adult-child interaction, another way of looking at the relationship is to see *interdependence* as the central tone in the relationship that is manifest in unusual ways. Discourses about the desire to achieve an independent, autonomous adulthood devalue the interdependent relationship achieved by the pairings between adult and child. A set of alternative values can celebrate this relationship as a model to be emulated in mainstream society, or as a challenge to look again at our own 'able-bodied' culture as deficient and flawed because of its over-reliance on the rhetorics of independence. Another reading can show how the independent, autonomous individual of modern western society is

actually a myth that serves the needs of an 'able-bodied community' in hegemonic ways over the 'disabled community'. By recognising that we all need support in order to get through the day, exercise choice, have a say, overcome barriers, make changes to our lives. Interdependence for the able-bodied is the taken-for-granted network of telecommunications, transport, economic and social structures that gives preferential treatment to certain kinds of bodies. The mobile phone, the car, the pavement, the shopping centre and the city itself work together to create an invisible network of support that maintains 'able-bodied' society in an illusory state of independence. Only a perspective from another point of view can help us see things this way. We could ask: *'Do people from other planets think that people with mobile phones have hearing impairments?'* or *'Do horses think that people in cars have problems with mobility?'*. Our reality is constructed out of a mirage-like vision of independence amid interdependence created out of cultural practices in planning and design that prescribe solution preferences for some body types. One reason for this is because they are guided by standards and norms that exclude others. For me, the activities of the children with disabilities in public play parks that I witnessed exposed this structured preference for some that conspires to create illusions of independence for an able-bodied majority.

10. QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Some particular issues / themes that seem to be worthy of further inquiry were:

10.1. Being Watched / Being Alone: Do children prefer to be watched or to be alone and in what circumstances? What is the child's 'reasoning' behind wishing to be 'out of sight' in play versus 'being watched'? How can this be explained beyond the simple reasons of experiencing fear of being unsafe or wishing to be safe? Is there a significant age at which this becomes a preferred option for children? What then are the implications for play park design, school grounds design? Wheway and Millward (1997, p33) have commented that children do seem to prefer places where they can be seen to out of the way places for play and suggest that the reasons for this may be parental influence and children's own fears. Yet, there is evidence that children are keen to be 'out of view' in the games they play (hide and seek) and in their den and hut building. There is a challenge to discover if children would prefer more places that would allow for 'safe but unseen' play and to discover what design solutions could be found to satisfy this preference.

10.2. Dens, Huts, Forts: What are the differences between girls and boys in their use of huts, forts etc? What is the significance of the location of them? Can play parks ever provide the location for a good 'den' when compared with the back garden or other 'secret site'? What are the reasons for the age significance in who constructs dens and where they get constructed (or imagined)? (e.g. Is it about older children moving farther away from home?) Do parents of different backgrounds think den and hut building is an appropriate activity for children? Why? Why not? What are the gender differences in how dens get used, constructed, 'imagined'?

10.3. Handrails: Given that British Standards do not allow for intermediate hand railing (handrails at different heights) because of the danger of heads being stuck between the bars etc., what other solutions can there be to the need for a handrail at many different and appropriate heights for children needing a bit more support?

10.4. Back Gardens and Public Spaces. There have been some efforts made to come up with an interim space between the back garden and the more public street or play area. These

plans have included shared open spaces behind gardens, shared gardens, and 'home zones' (streets with very low speed limits of 10mph or less that have some play equipment, speed tables, extended pavements, and more trees and bushes). While all of these have advantages for children's play generally, they have not been assessed for their amenability to the play of children with disabilities in particular. Further research into children with disabilities' experience in countries that have already got 'home zones' (Denmark and the Netherlands mainly) may be necessary to make useful comment here. However, the home zone concept has much to offer as a public play policy because

- it involves locals in all stages of the design process
- it provides a public space for children with disabilities that gets them out of private spaces like back gardens that may create unnecessary dependency
- these spaces provide the opportunity for children to learn about traffic without the risks associated with normal speed limits (of 30 or even 20mph)
- it would provide opportunity for more physical activity in the form of incidental play
- it would be a policy that has been shown to reduce accidents

At a time when many people are keen to bring up their children in more rural settings, this move provides a more environmentally sustainable solution to urban decay. A more public 'childhood' and a more public 'disabled childhood' run counter to the privatisation of children's lives where children walk less to school, are escorted more, and are transported around in cars (Children's Play Council, 1997). With the UK having the highest pedestrian mortality rates in Europe when compared with Germany, Spain, Denmark and others (Roberts et al., 1995), home zones provide an opportunity for local authorities to involve people in reclaiming their own 'streetscapes' and making provision for the child's right to play.

Valentine and McKendrick's (1997) study of a large sample of children and their parents have found that although a lot of children were spending a substantial amount of time outside, they were spending a large portion of that time in private gardens. This study has found a similar pattern among children with disabilities but children with disabilities' experience of play in private and/or supervised settings is greater than the average for populations of children nationally. McNeish and Roberts (1995) study for Barnardos found that 44% of children hardly ever played outdoors without adult supervision. So while this sub-population of children with a variety of disabilities are not alone in their experience they

probably have a higher experience of supervision than other children. Certainly when compared with the figures for children in working class areas (see chapter ?) their 'free range' (Hart's spatial mobility without adult supervision) experience is probably quite limited.[8]

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[8] A review of this research as part of the main author's research for a doctorate degree is available in the main text of the thesis *Children's Participation in Changing School Grounds and Public Play Areas in Scotland* (chapter 18).