



Alliance for Childhood



Alliance for Childhood UK Meeting Tuesday 24th March 2009
University of East London - Docklands Campus

Presentations

Christopher Clouder



Christopher Clouder FRSA is a co-founder and International Director of the Alliance for Childhood. He writes and gives public lectures widely throughout Europe and beyond on educational matters, contemporary issues and cultural evolution. He has produced various books and articles on education and childhood, and has lead an international commission to write a report on the status of Social and Emotional Education worldwide by a prestigious Spanish foundation. His recent publications include two books on Creative Play for parents of young children.

'Where Children Play' is an open theme. It can refer to inner space as well as outside space. The world of imagination is under attack as a romantic notion. A meeting Christopher attended recently in Prague came to the conclusion that there is a need to bring back romanticism. We need the power of imagination, not only the rational. It is being shunted aside by figures and targets and so on. We need to find new words to bring imagination into the future and not only dwell in the past.

'Imagination is not just the ability to invent, but is also the ability to disclose that which exists.'

Characters from Shakespeare exist in an imaginative world. Our culture is built on stories, whether English, French, or Australian, it is all invented. We can't dismiss play as fantasy or entertainment. All exist in playfulness. Playfulness is a work of art. It exists especially in teaching, as the inner sparkle with the child. We all play many roles now. This can become a burden unless we find a way to play. The gift of imagination means more than any talent for abstract thinking. Sweden has two words for play, lek and spiel. With the first imagination is let loose. The second has a purpose. Play as imagination is the way the child connects to the world. There is a concern and a feeling now that well-being is important.

Issy Cole-Hamilton



Issy Cole-Hamilton joined NCB in August 2000 as a policy and research officer with the Children's Play Council (CPC). She now leads the new CPC Policy and Research team being funded through the BIG Lottery Fund CPC Play England project. Issy works closely with government departments, especially the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, who fund CPC to undertake research and policy development work on children's play, as well as with individuals and organisations from the play and related sectors across England to develop and disseminate information. Before joining the Children's Play Council she worked for over 10 years in national voluntary organisations developing children's policy and promoting children's rights.

Play England began in 2000 with three people. Now there are 60 – the last three years were a transition time. They received money from the Big Lottery Fund to support local authorities, they have a contract with the department of Children, Schools and Families to implement the government play strategy and they work with Department of Culture Media and Sport. Issy gave an outline of the scope of the work Play England is engaged with. Also see Power Point presentation.

Seizing the Moment – how the campaign developed.

The Play Strategy has moved a long way in the last few years. The government and public are much more aware.

The Charter for Children's Play is Play England's charter. Its role is to create an the environment, working with children from birth to teenage years, focussing on the 8 to 13 age group. Children should be free to choose what they want to do.

Play is about play – it is successful if children want to play more.

Government agenda. The by-products of this contribute to Play England's agenda. They put together the evidence base, looking at the good side effects and the bad ones.

Think about where children play:

- the home,
- the street where they live,
- parks and open spaces,
- staffed play provision.
- the journey to school – children are in cars more, giving less opportunity for play.
- school break – there is less time allowed now for school play time;
- extended services and
- trips and outings.

What government policy affects these?

There are four things which improve opportunities:

time;

space;

permission – most important – children are being told to stop from the moment they can move independently;

environment – the quality affects the way children play.

Play Day theme this year is Make Time! for play.

The Play Offer

Ultimately we want children out playing. Local Authorities want children to be out playing more often. There needs to be spaces which children feel comfortable with.

Streets – *Manual for the Streets* is the weakest area. It needs more work with the department of Transport. How do we make streets more user friendly?

Home zones – areas where people and traffic have equal status – neighbourhoods need to be redesigned.

Road safety targets – we have the highest figures in Europe. Authorities meet the target by putting the children in their homes. They need to rise to the challenge to let them out to play.

Parks and streets – There is guidance to planners about open spaces and housing (PPG17, PPS3, S106).

Neighbourhood Renewal – Playshaper programme – gives a day of training about play to everyone involved in creating spaces, such as planners and designers.

Place Making Agenda and *Neighbourhood Renewal* has received £253 million. Every Local Authority (LA) gets £1 million for play facilities. They will be inspected on what children think about their play provision. Play England talks to the LA's to find out what access children have. They have produced the report *Managing Risk in Play Provision* (on website). Risks are weighed against benefits – risk-benefit analysis. A second publication is the *Play Design Guide* – also on the website, which encourages people to move away from fenced in areas with swings and roundabouts and be more imaginative.

Staffed Play Provision: Four thousand new playworkers are to be trained and there is money for adventure playgrounds, both new an existing. Play England promotes best practice. The playworkers role ripples out into the community.

Two years ago Play England had an idea. Now the government has taken it up. Gordon Brown was shocked by the UNICEF report. It kept coming up in focus groups that children had nowhere to play. They decided to act

and were able to build on the work of Play England and others. From a starting point of 30 LA's with a play policy, there are now 351. As a next step, Play England will go round areas to see where next to focus - the policy road show – asking what should we be saying now?

The point of **seizing the moment** has come around for a second time.

Sally Schweizer



Sally Schweizer has been an educator of children and adults for around 40 years. Her second book 'Under the Sky, Playing, Working and Enjoying Adventures in the Open Air, A Handbook for Parents, Carers and Teachers' will be published in April, and follows 'Well I Wonder, Childhood in the Modern World', both for Sophia Books, an imprint of Rudolf Steiner Press.

Sally made her presentation in stories and images, beginning with the nine year old who secretly waved when no-one was looking.

Children have a dynamic urge to play. They will play anywhere using what is around them as their equipment – sticks, feathers, stones. They have an urge for movement. Play and movement are intertwined. Learning comes through movement. Physical movement is apparent in young children. They want to go back and revisit places, they want challenges, to make discoveries. They need open ended spaces and creativity enhancing toys. You don't need a Wendy house when you have a table or cardboard boxes. There are the outdoor spaces, creating a treasure island with logs and bricks and other things then putting them away again afterwards.

We had a sense of wonder as a child and a capacity for metamorphosis in play – taking in the new with a sense of wonder. Children around the age of six will create something out of fairytale figures. Adults provide scenes from puppet shows, giving guidance in a dream world. A playful nature can help, for example with a child who won't put their coat on. They enjoy it when an adult plays the clown. Tidying up uses play – rabbits pick things up. They like silly verses.

Climbing trees is an opportunity for multiple skills practice. Children love to fly – they jump off walls. They like to drag things and pull pulleys. They like water – pumps and gutters, blocked drains. They love to play in water. After playing in the flood, they reconstructed it back inside.

Penny Wilson



Penny Wilson is a play worker in London's Adventure Playgrounds. Play workers support children's creative play without directing or dominating it. Penny helps staff in parks, children's museums, and schools become play workers. The Play Association Tower Hamlets has worked on estates to try to create areas where children can play safely, not just in designated playgrounds. Penny has been invited to advise on projects in New York, Chicago and Washington which are trying to reintroduce the concept of play

Penny introduced us to Lady Allen of Hurtwood and her book *Memoirs of an Uneducated Lady*. She started junk play in Copenhagen during the Nazi occupation. She started adventure playgrounds and playworkers.

Compensatory environments compensate for the lack of mud, trees and so on. The idyll is not possible in Tower Hamlets. How to do this in a high rise estate? Simon Nicholson proposed the theory of loose parts – something that can be what you want it to be, for example, a log of wood.

There are 16 play types identified by Bob Hughes, which include deep (danger) play and rough and tumble. Children of all cultural backgrounds all do the same things. Play deprivation creates a lack of ability to see yourself in the world. Stuart Brown found that play deprivation was a factor in the Texas University massacre and other similar incidents.

Matt Davies

Matt Davies, founder of the Planet Earth consultancy is an acknowledged expert in his field with over 15 years experience. He lectures at Greenwich University in the school of Architecture & Construction and is recent past Chair of Landscape Architecture South East. He writes articles periodically for Landscape, Architect's Journal, Building Design and Eco Design and has assessed competitions for the RIBA and served on the Landscape Institute Awards judging panel.

The best playgrounds are not designed. The challenge is to draw children away from computers and other such things.

Matt works with the four elements – earth, water, air and fire. Here are some of the qualities of each:

- Earth: relates to structures, boundaries and form. There is a need for a clear boundary.
- Water: The ephemeral – rain water, ceramic channels, plants, big leaves, circulatory. Space for participatory consciousness, places for people to meet, especially at entrances, movement pattern, form in movement, playful – skate boards and cycles.
- Air: instinct, feeling secure, comfortable on edges, under tables, seat in the sun, places to hide, and be seen.
- Fire: art, human endeavour in the form of art. Open up to family and social gatherings – festivals, fire on bonfire night; eating out – family barbecues, fireworks.

All human beings experience biophilia – a deep need for nature;
Mythopoeic – not scripted, can't be scripted. The playground will be used in ways you don't expect.
Magic and mystery

There are no text books or is there a professional way of designing a playground. Playground design evolves from landscape architecture which evolved out of architecture.

Mat is interested in looking at ancient landscapes such as stone circles. It took a huge effort to raise the stones and they seem to say 'I'm here, this is my environment'; also ritualistic spaces, enclosed spaces – it's an archetypal form to put a stone on end, as he did in a playground in Newham; and hills, hollows and bridges.

25% of a playground's surface area is play structure to space and safety surface area.

From notes taken by Marion Briggs