Greener and safer – How do children play in their communities?

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Research Question

• Acknowledgment: City of Melville - contract research

• City of Melville wanted to know what were the sport, recreation and leisure needs of the children and their families living in the City of Melbourne?

• We were interested in how and where children played in their communities.
In keeping with....

- Child friendly cities
- The Convention on the Rights of Child
- Sociological literature which has positioned the child centre stage
- Growing trend in education systems to gather views from the child’s perspective
From a cultural-historical perspective...

- Inspired by child-centred research

- Go beyond listening to the child to identifying the analytical techniques for understanding what the child is seeking to communicate
Theoretical perspective

• **Social situation of development:**
  – *The social situation of development represents the initial moment for all dynamic changes that occur in development during the given period. It determines wholly and completely the forms and the path along which the child will acquire ever newer personality characteristics, drawing them from the social reality as from the basic source of development, the path along which the social becomes the individual. Thus, the first question we must answer in studying the dynamics of any age is to explain the social situation of development* (Vygotsky, 1998: 198).
Cultural-historical framework for gathering the child’s perspective

In schools
- Stimulus
- Environmental walk with cameras
- Discussion/reports/drawings

In the community
- Children take home disposable cameras

School and community
- Local Think Tank
Cultural-historical framework

Hedegaard (2005)
Sample

Schools:
• South Clara Primary School
• St Joseph Primary School
• Clara Primary School
• North Melville Primary School
• Holy Family Primary School

Year Levels
• Early Years, Middle years and the Senior Years

Children (n=600)
Families (n=100)
Cultural groups (e.g. Vietnamese, Sudanese, Chinese, Portuguese)
Connecting with the children:
Identify the sport, recreation and leisure needs of children and their families within the City of Melbourne

- **5-7 year olds**: A letter from Teddy
- **8-10 year olds**: Sherlock Holmes/Detective
- **11-12 year olds**: TV news team
Data generation steps

- Environmental walk taking photographs
- Screening and discussing photographs
- Children take home disposable cameras and note books - replicate the process
- Interviewing children
- Children’s Think Tank
Data Sources: Children’s photos & group/individual interviews
Data Sources: Work Samples
Data Sources: Children’s video reports
Data Sources: Home-community photos and interviews
Data Sources: Children’s Think Tank & Community input

- What sport, recreational and leisure needs do you have?
- What would you like?
- What do you have that you wish to maintain?
Findings

Children’s perspective
Findings

• Greener not greyer
• Open spaces
• Feeling safe
• Better facilities for 10-12 year old
• Access
• Concerns about pollution
• Designing spaces and equipment with a child’s eye
• Cultural activities
That ones, people shouldn’t stuff rubbish in the drains because the rubbish will go down to our river and pollute them as well and it will be polluting as well as letting our animals choke. It just doesn’t look right I think rubbish shouldn’t be in a drain, it should be in a bin.

“We want more trees, flowers and grass – and less pollution”
I went to the park, but I need to come back to go the toilet and were going back to the park, but then my mom said it was getting late and I already played in the park. There are any toilets in the park. I live in a flat and there is a park down in the building. I can take care of myself (7 years old) but I am not allowed. Mika (H.F.P.S)

Girl One: There are so many druggies and they fight and swear
Girl Five: …and people get scared and go.
Girl One: Sometimes I see from the window some druggies are fighting in the night.
Girl Two: …and there is this dog and the owner doesn’t care if he bites someone…and he chases this little girl and bit her!
(C.P.S)
In the traffic roundabouts we want more tables and seats so that people can go there.

ACCESS
A cultural-historical approach to research

Process:
Repetition of material gathering process allowed children to:

• Gain a better understanding of the purpose of the research;
• Engage in authentic informed consent for being involved in research;
• To have many opportunities for expressing their views.
A cultural-historical approach to research

Process:
• children practising to be researchers with support before they worked independently at home and in the community gathering data;

• Dialectics between photographs (context) and children’s comments enabled a more complete and rounded data set to be generated;
A cultural-historical approach to research

Analysis:

• Viewing interview protocols and photographic material generation and analysis as a dynamic rather than a static process

• Better understanding the protocols generated from the children’s documented play experiences when families also interrogated the protocols;
A cultural-historical approach to research

Analysis:
• Going beyond listening to understanding; and

• We gained an embedded contextual and cultural understanding of the children’s comments/responses.