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PUPIL PARTICIPATION AND PLAYGROUND DESIGN: LISTENING AND RESPONDING TO CHILDREN'S VIEWS

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PUPIL PARTICIPATION AND PLAYGROUND DESIGN: LISTENING AND RESPONDING TO CHILDREN'S VIEWS

Abstract

This paper outlines a small scale research project that attempted to involve primary aged pupils actively in the redesign of their school playground. The project stemmed from concerns raised by school staff regarding the frequency of problematic behaviours during unstructured times, (particularly lunch times), and the decision to redesign the playground was one component of a larger scale research project. This paper provides an account of this process, and an overview of the approach taken to involve children as co-researchers to ensure that their views were not only heard, but that they played a key role in decisions that would affect them. This offers an alternative way in which educational psychologists can address teacher concerns regarding behaviour that attempts to involve and empower young people in the process.

Introduction

The "problem" of playground behaviour

The 'problem' of playground behaviour and requests to educational psychology services for support in managing this are not a new phenomenon (Briggs, MacKay & Miller, 1995; Roderick, Pitchford & Miller, 1997). Nearly 30 years ago the Elton report, for example, suggested that school staff felt that 'lunchtime is the biggest single behaviour-related problem that they face' (DES, 1989, p.122). A number of approaches and interventions have been utilised by school staff in attempts to reduce the frequency and severity of problematic behaviour at

unstructured times. These have included increasing the number of adults supervising the playground, stricter rules and sanctions, alternative provision including indoor activities for particular students, segregation of the playground space and reduced time for breaks (Evans, 2001; Mulryan-Kyne, 2014). However, this adult interventionist stance risks overrunning children's freedom (Blatchford, 1998; Thomson, 2005). Research suggests that these approaches are often implemented without consultation with children and young people, and are not always well received by the children whom they affect (Evans, 2001; Thomson, 2007).

In recent years the focus of concern has shifted from playground behaviour to the issue of sedentary lifestyles and childhood obesity. This has led to a focus on interventions in the school playground that aim to increase physical activity in order to improve children's health. This change of focus has tended to reduce consultation with children as these interventions are usually imposed by adults within the school with no reference to the views of the children (Bonell et al., 2013; Barton, Sandercock, Pretty & Wood, 2015).

Children's views on their playground

A number of authors have noted the significance of the playground to children. The playground has commonly been identified as children's 'favourite place' and it is their experiences in this environment that they often comment upon when questioned about their school day (Darmody, Smyth & Doherty, 2010; Mulryan-Kyne, 2014). Nevertheless, key decisions regarding this environment are often made by adults, based on adult perceptions. While children are not an homogenous group, research that has elicited children's views has highlighted reported likes and dislikes regarding playground spaces, as well as suggestions

for changes and improvements. This has included 'more dos' and 'fewer don'ts' (in terms of adults' regulations), preferences for natural settings, and for some children a preference for solitude and frustration if they are encouraged to play with others (Evans, 2001; Thomson, 2007; Pearce & Bailey, 2011).

Efforts to elicit pupil views have also highlighted that these are, at times, in stark contrast to adult perceptions (Thompson, 1995). Different perceptions on the causes of boredom in the playground for example, suggest that children have related this to the limitations of the environment, whereas adults attribute boredom and inappropriate behaviour to children's inability to play (Titman, 1994). Although a dated study, Bishop, Peterson, and Michaels (1972) provided a useful example of how adults' and children's views on play spaces differ. These authors asked designers (playing the role of eight year olds) and children to rate their preferred play environments. Little correlation was reported between choices made by children and adults, leading the authors to conclude that the adults were unable to predict children's preferences accurately (Bishop, Peterson & Michaels, 1972). Perhaps it is for this reason that children have been suggested to provide ideas for designs that adults have not considered (Rudduck & Flutter, 2004).

While researchers have advocated the importance of listening to children's views and the valued contributions that young people can make in discussions regarding the playground, they tend to stop here, and it is not clear whether children's views have been used to facilitate change. Failure to act on children's ideas may also leave children feeling undervalued and critical of the research process and/or school staff (Titman, 1994).

Children's participation in design projects

Recognising the added benefits that children can bring to the process, a number of researchers and designers have taken participation one step further and have involved children in the design of play spaces and school grounds (Clark, 2010). Active involvement in changing and managing the physical spaces within the school environment has been reported to be influential in both children's behaviour and attitude towards this environment and also the wider school (Titman, 1994). The growing involvement of children in the design of social spaces, particularly city spaces, has led some authors to propose a number of different participatory approaches to involving children in the design and planning process. A model that has been applied to participatory research with children is Hart's (1992) ladder of participation. Hart, as co-director of the Children's Environment Research Group at the City University of New York, writes widely on participatory approaches with children in research, and specifically on research investigating children's relationship to the physical environment and environmental education, including the planning and design of children's environments. Hence, while a range of models to participation exist, his is particularly relevant to research involving the design of environmental spaces. Some practitioners have directly applied this to environmental design work with children, as shown in Table1.

Degree of participation	Application to environmental design
8. Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults	Young people initiate ideas and collaborate with adults. This may develop out of children's observations of their community, such as a desire to clean up a community

	area.
7. Child-initiated and directed	Children initiate and conduct projects independently. Hart (1992) suggests that it is difficult to find examples of child initiated projects as adults are not typically good at responding to such initiatives.
6. Adult –initiated, shared decisions with children	Adults initiate the project but children are involved in making decisions alongside adults. This may include decisions regarding fundraising, organisation and management.
5. Consulted and informed	Adults run and design the project but children are fully informed and their views treated with integrity. For example, children's views on the garden are gained via the survey and the findings are shared with them. Children themselves may analyse and report on the findings.
4. Assigned but informed	Children are fully informed about the intentions of the project and why they are involved. Children assigned to roles.
3. Tokenism	Particular young people are selected to talk about the garden in public, but with no opportunity to consult their peers.
2. Decoration	Children promote the project by wearing garden t-shirts or writing a song, but have little awareness of the programme.
1. Manipulation	Children produce a poster, advertisement or publication about the project and/or may contribute practically to the garden design (e.g. by planting) but it is adults that take

	charge in overall design.

Table 1: Hart's ladder of participation applied to environmental projects (Hart, 1992; Cornell University)

Hart (1992) suggests that the lower rungs of the ladder (stages 1-3) reflect models of non-participation, and that 'true' participation only exists in stages 4 and above. However, the he cautions that this ladder should not be used as a simple measuring stick for the quality of a programme, and that participation will vary in relation to a number of factors. It is suggested that:

> In a participatory design project it is not possible, neither is it necessary, to achieve equal representation by all children. Actually some children may not wish to participate at all. However, it is important to give equal opportunity to all children for participation (Iltus and Hart, 1994, p.363).

Levels of participation are also said to vary according to the child's developmental stage. However, some authors have suggested that participatory research can even be conducted with young children, using methods such as 'The Mosaic Approach' (Clark & Moss, 2001). The Mosiac Approach uses multiple methods of data gathering to promote the active engagement of children, including observation, interviews, photographs taken by children and child led tours of their educational setting. Some EPs have been influenced by such approaches and advocate their use in practice. Mercieca and Mercieca (2014, p.29), for example, suggest that 'it is the attitude which the Mosaic approach highlights and which is helpful for EP practice, if listening which does not silence is to take place'.

The role of the EP

Educational psychologists have demonstrated a keen interest in approaches to research and practice that are participatory and promote pupil voice (Burton, Smith & Woods, 2010; Davies & Lewis, 2013). This may be due to the profession's concern with 'advocating for the empowerment of young people and encouraging practices that promote both the confidence to articulate opinion, as well as suggesting a variety of ways to communicate effectively' (Greig, Hobbs & Roffey, 2014). This can be difficult in education, where practices are often concerned with the control of pupils, rather than promoting agency (Greig et al., 2014).

In their work with schools EPs routinely consider the influence of the environment on children's learning, wellbeing and behaviour (LaRocque, 2008; Sean Kearney, Smith & Maika, 2016). Regular visits to school settings also mean that EPs develop an awareness of the needs and culture within a school, which can not only give them an insight into systemic factors that may be affecting children's behaviour, but the establishment of pre-existing relationships may also permit some flexibility to suggest different approaches to trial. On reflection then, this may place EPs in a unique position to consider intervening at the level of the physical environment through the use of participatory approaches, particularly in light of the difficulty that environmental researchers and organisations experience in initiating community participation within schools.

Furthermore in light of EPs' research skills and desire to empower and advocate for young people, it is surprising that concerns regarding behaviour at unstructured times have frequently resulted in research that has predominantly

ignored the physical environment and/or ignored children's views (Briggs, MacKay & Miller, 1995; Roderick, Pitchford & Miller, 1997). This may reflect the dominance of positivist research over participatory research methods within childhood studies (Blaisdell, 2012). Thus the present research appears to be both timely and relevant to EP practice and suggests an alternative way in which EPs can respond to concerns regarding young people's behaviour and, in the process, encourage pupil participation which fits with professional and ethical values of empowering and advocating for children.

Background to the project

Contextual information

The school in which the project took place was a smaller than average primary school located in the West Midlands, where almost half of the pupils are eligible for pupil premium funding. There are a below-average proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups and no pupils who speak English as an additional language. At one in five, there is a higher than average proportion of pupils who have special educational needs.

Negotiating the project

The project took place in a mainstream primary school where discussions with senior leadership team in planning meetings highlighted that much of the negotiated work focussed on pupils who were identified due to concerns regarding their behaviour and well-being, and that problematic behaviour at unstructured times, particularly lunch times, was a consistent theme across these cases. Members of the senior leadership team believed that behaviour, and specifically behaviour at lunchtimes was a broader area of difficulty across

the school, and were concerned that this had persisted despite training courses that had been provided to lunchtime supervisors by the local authority's Behaviour Support Service. Commonly reported difficulties included fighting (physical and/or verbal) amongst children, failure to listen to staff members (particularly lunchtime supervisors), as well as 'rudeness' to staff. These difficulties were reported to occur across the school, but were more apparent in Key Stage Two. School staff kept a log of significant or severe incidents, yet many incidents were not recorded and consequently precise data regarding the nature and frequency of behavioural incidents was not available. For these reasons, it was agreed that research into the current status of behaviour at lunch times, including factors that may be contributing to and sustaining any problematic behaviour, would be helpful in informing the most appropriate forms of action to implement change, with the aim of improving behaviour during lunchtime.

This paper presents one aspect of the project, specifically the redesign of the playground. The following section outlines how this came to fruition in more detail, and then describes the process taken to involve children as co-researchers to ensure that their views were not only heard, but played a key role in decisions that would affect them. This is structured under the stages followed including: 'Assess', 'Plan', 'Action' and 'Outcome' (see Figure 1 for an overview of each stage). These stages are presented separately; however, there was overlap as the project developed in an iterative, rather than a linear fashion.

Assess	Stage 1: Initial data gathering with staff as part of overarching project
	Stage 2: Focus group to gather children's views to follow up concerns raised in stage 1
Plan	Stage 3: Research team established
Action	Stage 4: Dream school data gathered from pupils / Stage 4: Wall display established
Outcome	Stage 5: Model created and presented to Senior Leadership
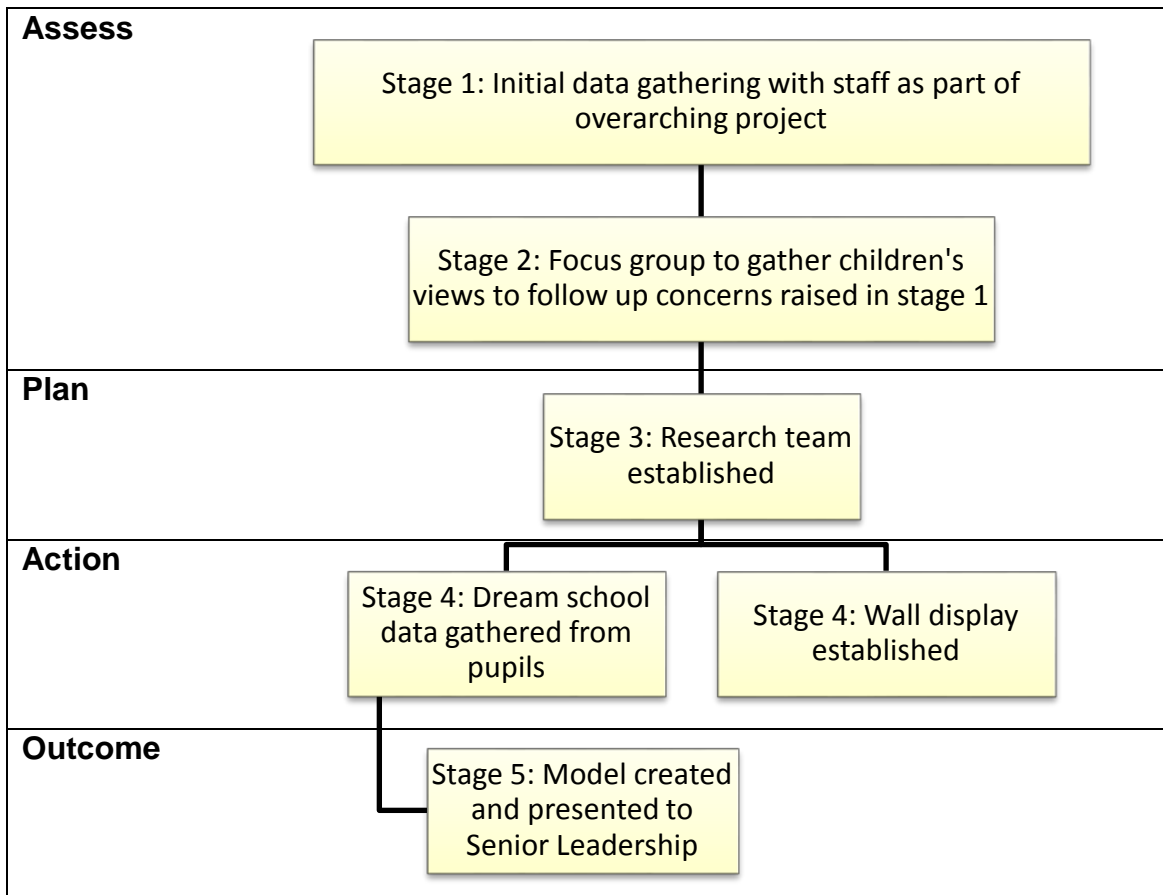
Figure 1: Stages of the project

Implementing the Project

Assess

Stage 1: Initial data gathering with staff as part of overarching project

The overarching project consisted of a number of phases and was structured using the Research and Development in Organisations (RADiO) framework (Timmins, Bham, McFayden & Ward, 2007) which is a process used to support the planning and undertaking of projects within organisations. The stages of the process are outlined in Table 2.   This approach ensured that the research was collaborative and negotiated with key stakeholders, and that organisational and

cultural issues were identified and carefully considered in the context of the research.

RADIO phases	RADIO stages	Typical activities
Clarifying concerns	1. Awareness of need	School/EPS/LEA request or EPS suggestion
	2. Invitation to act	Contracting EP role in organisational development
	3. Clarifying organisational and cultural issues	Exploring opportunities and threats relating to initiative
	4. Identifying stakeholders	Agreeing processes for collaborating with stakeholders for feedback and discussion, e.g. coordinating group and initiative co-ordinator
Research methods mode	5. Agreeing the focus of concern	Identifying research aims and purposes.
	6. Negotiating the framework for data gathering	Issues and decisions regarding methodology, methods, resources and timescales
	7. Gathering information	Using agreed methods
	8. Processing information with stakeholders	Sharing findings with stakeholders
Organisational change mode	9. Agreeing areas for future action	Discussing findings in relation to organisation's needs and identifying areas action for
	10. Action planning	Stakeholder-led planning process
	11. Implementation /action	Stakeholders facilitating change within organisation
	12. Evaluating action	Stakeholders reviewing effectiveness of action and possibly requesting further EP involvement

Table 2: the stages of the RADIO model (taken from Timmins et al, 2007)

Initial actions included:

- A scoping meeting with the senior leadership team and the lead lunch time supervisor (the research sponsors) to identify factors that were deemed to be affecting behaviour.

- A questionnaire to all staff (including those who did not perform a teaching / teaching assistant role – such as lunchtime supervisors) to

explore attributions of behaviour at various times of the day, including lunch time. This also explored factors that were believed to be contributing to problematic behaviour and factors that were considered to be helping to improve behaviour during this time.

- A focus group with lunch time supervisors to elicit more detailed information regarding their views, including their perception of previous training received and alternative factors that may be affecting behaviour. Further discussion also centred on attributions for behaviour (taken from the questionnaire), which lunchtime supervisors were asked to rank as a group.

Information gathered using the above methods was analysed to examine the most commonly reported attributions of children's misbehaviour. While the limitations of examining attributions are recognised, as these can reflect differential cultural values, they are still considered useful in gaining an understanding of how behaviour is constructed in a specific context (Miller, Ferguson, & Moore, 2002; Gibbs & Gardiner, 2008). This was particularly relevant in the present research as the initial meetings with senior leadership team and lunch time supervisors highlighted tensions and contradictory attributions between these groups regarding the perceived cause of problematic behaviour, with members of the senior leadership team feeling that this may be due to ineffective supervision from staff, and lunchtime supervisors reporting that factors relating to the pupils and environment were contributing to problematic behaviour. Data were therefore analysed according to whether staff attributed children's misbehaviour at lunch time to result from factors associated with:

- pupils (e.g. 'pupils are attention seeking', 'pupils require more help in order to learn how to play appropriately');

- staff (e.g. 'staff members give more time to pupils who misbehave', 'there needs to be more consistency in behaviour management approaches across staff'); or

- the environment (e.g. 'the environment is dull and uninteresting', 'the environment needs to be structured differently')

At the level of the environment, staff commonly attributed children's behaviour to the physical environment being dull, uninteresting, and not very appealing. A number of staff, particularly lunch time supervisors, also perceived that children were bored. For these reasons, it was agreed that children's views would be sought to clarify their views regarding their experiences of lunchtime and their perceptions of the playground. Due to time limitations, it was agreed that a focus group would be held with a group of pupils to seek their views. The limitations of this method are noted, as it was not possible to seek the views of all children; however, it was believed that a focus group may be a viable first step to engage pupils who could then elicit the views of their peers, thus making effective use of the time of researchers, while involving children more actively in the project.

Stage 2: Focus group to gather children's views to follow up concerns raised at Stage 1

The focus group was held with 12 pupils from Key Stage Two. The two key stages had a split lunch time, and the research sponsors decided to focus on Key Stage Two provision initially. A script was provided to school staff outlining what participation in the focus group would involve, so that children could

volunteer, and school staff were asked to select two to three volunteers from each year group (Years 3 to 6) to take part in the focus group. The final list of pupils was selected by staff; however, it was suggested that it would be beneficial to select a range of children including those who have some difficulties during lunchtime, those who do not and a mixture of boys and girls in order to gain a range of views. Children were informed that their participation was voluntary and consent was sought from all pupils. Children were also aware that they could withdraw from the project at any time, and one pupil chose to do this towards the end of the focus group.

In preparation for the focus group, children were asked to draw a map of the playground and photo elicitation methods were used as children were invited to take pictures of areas of the playground that they liked, did not like, where they felt problems occurred, and anything else they wished to share. This method was used in an attempt to understand children's views and experiences of the playground and to involve children as active participants within the research (Epstein et al., 2006; Jorgenson & Sullivan, 2009).

During the focus group, children were invited to rate the overall behaviour in their classroom as well as at playtime and at lunchtime, as this reflected the questions that staff were asked in the questionnaire and allowed a comparison of responses. A simple rating scale, where 0 represented 'poor behaviour' and 10 represented 'excellent behaviour' was used, and children were asked to place a post-it note with their name written on to the relevant number to represent their perspective. Children were also encouraged to discuss their photos and maps as a group and their ideas were annotated on a larger map

which was then colour-coded to reflect areas of the playground that the group wished 'to keep', 'to change' and 'to bin'.

From the discussion, it was evident that on the whole, children rated behaviour at lunchtimes as poorer than behaviour at playtime or in the classroom. This was consistent with the views of staff. Children also had clear views about their playground, and while all children were able to identify areas that they liked, they also noted how some areas had become unkempt and expressed frustration at previous changes to the playground that had occurred without consultation with them, including the removal of favoured equipment. Children were able to identify 'hotspots' where behavioural difficulties occurred, and suggest why they occurred, such as the position of the football pitch which took up a large part of the centre of the playground and meant that problems occurred when children walked through this area, or played alternative games that spilled into this area.

All children welcomed the possibility of changes to the playground environment, but recognised that it would be beneficial to consult with the wider school. All children from the focus group agreed that they would like to be part of a 'research team' who would be tasked with researching other children's views about the playground and then using these ideas to plan how to improve the playground.

Plan

Stage 3: Research team established

A further meeting was arranged with the research team and two of the research sponsors in order to plan next steps in improving the playground. Additional children who had not taken part in the focus group, but were taking part in

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alternative project activities, also joined the research team, at school staff's discretion. The meeting began with the research team considering possible research questions in order to identify and plan what information they wanted or needed to find out from other children, in order to improve the playground. A range of possible questions was discussed, some which involved finding more information about children's views of the current playground (e.g. how is the playground space used? What areas do other children like/dislike?) Others questions involved finding out about changes children would like to see for this space (e.g. what would other children like in their dream playground?).

In order to ensure that children's views were represented as far as possible in any changes to the playground, the research team agreed to focus on eliciting children's views regarding what they would like their dream playground to look like. A range of possible research tools were discussed when determining how children would elicit this information, and the advantages and disadvantages of these were considered to facilitate decision making (please see Table 2 for an example of some of the possible methods discussed).

| Method	Advantages discussed	Disadvantages discussed
Questionnaires	• Enable us to seek the views of lots of children	• Lots of data to analyse – time! • Different questionnaires necessary for different age groups?
Interviews	• We can get more detailed information or ask for more information if we need it	• Will take a lot of time • We won't be able to interview many people
Drawing / design competition	• All children can take part • Fun for children	• We cannot use everyone's ideas

Table 3: Possible methods discussed

On the basis of this discussion, the research team identified that they would like to explore children's ideas about their dream playground through the use a drawing / design competition. The research team also suggested that a wall display in school could enable them to communicate information about the project to the wider school and that this space could also be used to gain feedback from children and/or staff. Finally, the research team identified that they would like to make a physical model of their proposed playground, based on the information gained from their research, which could be presented to the senior leadership team.

Due to time limitations, specific details of next steps, such as how the drawing / design competition would be communicated to the wider school, could not be planned with the research team, although this would have been desirable and congruent with the participatory aims of the project. Nevertheless, the research team's ideas were taken on board by the research sponsors, who agreed that children would be invited to enter the drawing / design competition to draw their dream playground. It was agreed that each class would vote to select their top two designs (based on highest numbers of votes) and that the winning drawings would go to the research team to be reviewed and incorporated into the final model that would be presented to SLT.

Action

Stage 4: Dream school data gathered from pupils

Figure 2: an example of the pupils' designs
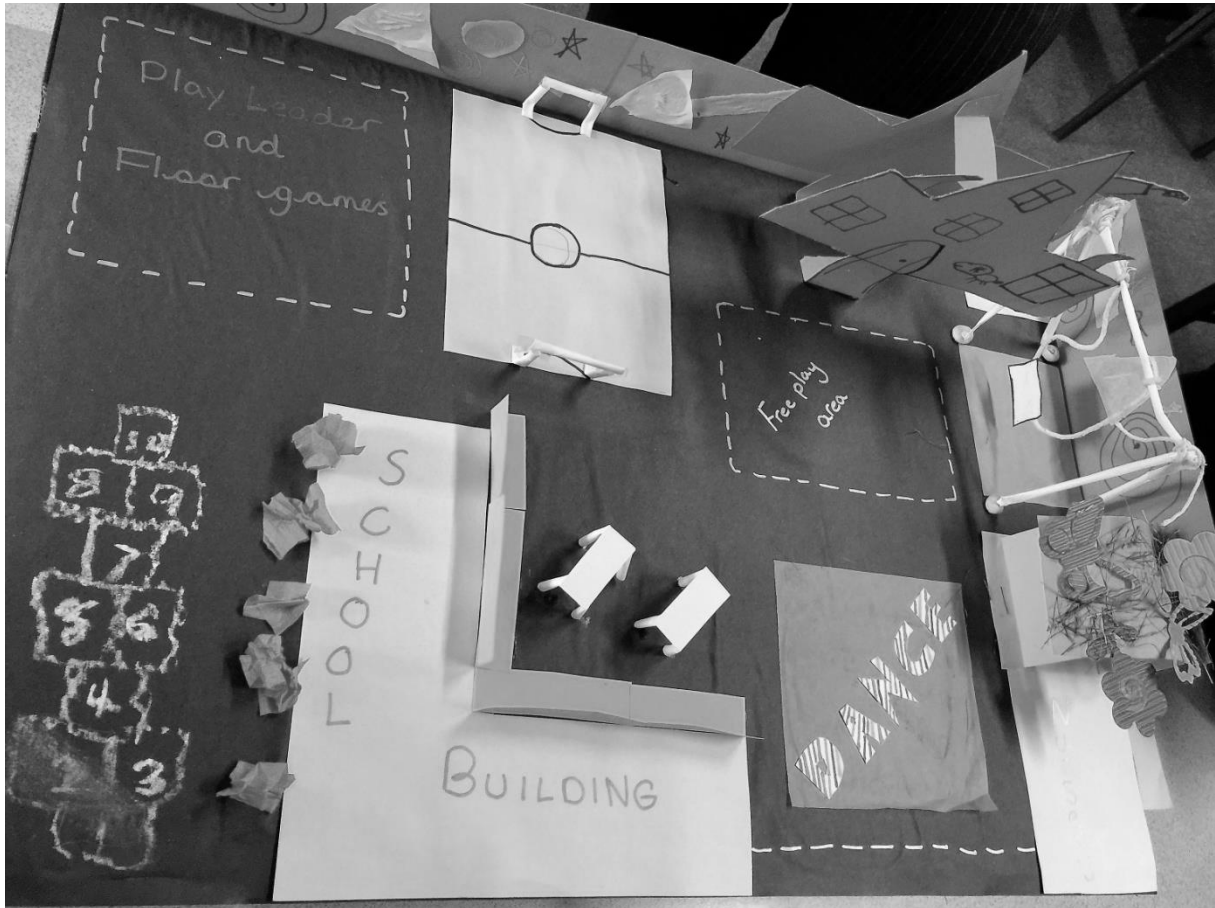
All children from Reception to Year 6 were invited to design their dream playground and a PowerPoint presentation was provided to the school to support introducing this task to children. Each class voted for their favourite designs and these were presented to the research team. The research team reviewed the designs with two of the research sponsors. The research sponsors and research team members agreed a framework that was used to review the drawings, which included rating aspects of children's designs on the basis of cost, safety and fun. The research team then incorporated elements of

children's designs in their own plan, which formed the basis for the final model. Alongside this process, the wall display was established in school where information regarding the drawing competition and various other changes that were happening as part of the overarching project were communicated to pupils, staff and parents.

Outcomes

Stage 5: Model created and presented to the senior leadership team

The research team met with the research sponsors on a number of occasions to finalise their plan of the proposed new playground and to create their model. This was presented to the senior leadership team for consideration in the final week of the summer term. The research team's proposal for the new playground indicated that consideration had been given to the different ages and also different preferences or needs of pupils. This included a seated area for children who wished to sit out of the various activities that were on offer. The research team had included a playhouse which they suggested could include toys, such as dolls, for younger pupils to play with. The football pitch had been reduced in size to enable other designated areas for structured games or for free play. The school had recently introduced dancing as a lunchtime activity but as yet there was no designated space for this, so the research team considered that this would be an important addition. It was proposed that a garden area would also enable the school to grow its own vegetables; pupils felt that the current planting boxes were unkempt and could be improved. The research team outlined a number of ideas that were dismissed after careful consideration, such as a ball pit, which was dismissed on safety grounds.

The model was well received by the senior leadership team, who suggested that a next step in the autumn term could be to draw out the plan onto the playground using chalk, and to begin to think about costing and fundraising to enable the school to secure resources. It was agreed that a meeting in the autumn term would enable SLT to consider the ideas more carefully, including issues relating to health and safety.

Discussion

This paper has outlined a small scale research project which actively involved young people in the redesign of their school playground. As will be evident, this is the start of what will be an ongoing and longer term project, and for this reason it is not possible at present to evaluate the extent to which children's ideas are taken on board and implemented in practice. It is possible, however, to reflect critically on the process so far, identifying strengths, limitations and challenges encountered. A key aim of the present project was to involve young people actively through participatory methods. To evaluate the success of this, feedback was sought from members of the research team. This feedback is therefore considered in this section when evaluating the project.

Children's views on their playground

Consistent with previous literature, this research highlighted that children have valid and valuable views about their playground and the causes of behavioural problems in this environment, and that their views are often different from those of adults (Thompson, 1995; Titman, 1994). Information gained from staff in the early stages of this project highlighted a range of factors that were perceived to be contributing to children's behaviour at lunchtimes. Some of these attributed misbehaviour to pupil attributes (e.g. emotional intelligence, peer influences),

some reflected concerns regarding poor behaviour management and supervision from staff, and others highlighted a 'bland, grim concrete environment' and a lack of stimulation. Discussion with pupils, however, indicated additional factors in the environment that were perceived to contribute to poor behaviour which was concerned with the structure and position of particular activities (e.g. football). This supports the suggestions of previous research which proposes that consulting with children can result in ideas for designs that adults have not considered (Rudduck and Flutter, 2004). Consultation with children in the present research also indicated that previous changes to the playground, such as the removal of equipment, were implemented without consultation with pupils, and were not well received, as has been reported in previous research (Evans, 2001; Thomson, 2007).

Children's participation in the research

A strength of this research was that pupils were consulted and their views regarding behaviour at lunchtimes and their perceptions of the playground were carefully considered. The project attempted to move beyond simply listening to children and aimed to involve them actively in decisions that would be made regarding their playground. In this project it was not possible to consult with all children, although it is recognised that this is rarely possible nor necessary, even in participatory research (Iltus & Hart, 1994). A strength of the project, was that attempts were made to give all children an equal opportunity to participate through the use of the design competition and the wall display that enabled feedback to be given and received from all pupils. It is recognised that in other stages of the project, participation was limited. For example, adults controlled and decided the final list of pupils who were involved in the focus

group and the research team, and this was limited to Key Stage Two pupils. Furthermore, due to the limitations of time, the adults involved in the research took on the research team's ideas regarding the design competition, but again made decisions about how this would be conducted and communicated to pupils.

These tensions highlight the complexities of participatory research with children, including the extent to which 'full' participation can be achieved. Gallacher and Gallacher (2008, p.499) question assumptions underpinning participatory research and critique such approaches for their presentation as 'fool-proof', unproblematic and objectively 'right'. These authors highlight that 'participatory approaches seem to have an epistemological advantage over more traditional approaches...' based on assumptions that full participation should engage children as participants in the research process, if not as researchers themselves (Gallacher & Gallacher, 2008, p.499). This is reflected in Hart's (1992) ladder of participation in which child-initiated projects seem to reflect 'full' or 'true' participation. On the basis of this conceptualisation, the present research was adult-initiated, but involved consultation with and to some extent shared decision-making with children (Hart, 1992). While this may not constitute 'full' participation, the present project was believed to be participatory in the 'methodological attitude taken' and the principles underpinning the research (Gallacher & Gallacher, 2008). Feedback was sought to assess whether this view was shared by the pupils involved in the project.

Pupils were asked for feedback via a questionnaire to explore whether their experience within the research team had reflected a number of the principles of

participatory research (Aspinwall & Larkins, 2002). Specifically, pupils were asked:

- Were you happy to take part in the project?

- Did you feel as though adults have really listened to your views and opinions?

- Did you feel as though other children have really listened to your views and opinions?

- Do you feel as though you have been involved in deciding and organising what would happen in the project?

- Do you feel confident that your ideas are going to be taken forward and used to make the playground better?

- Did you have fun?

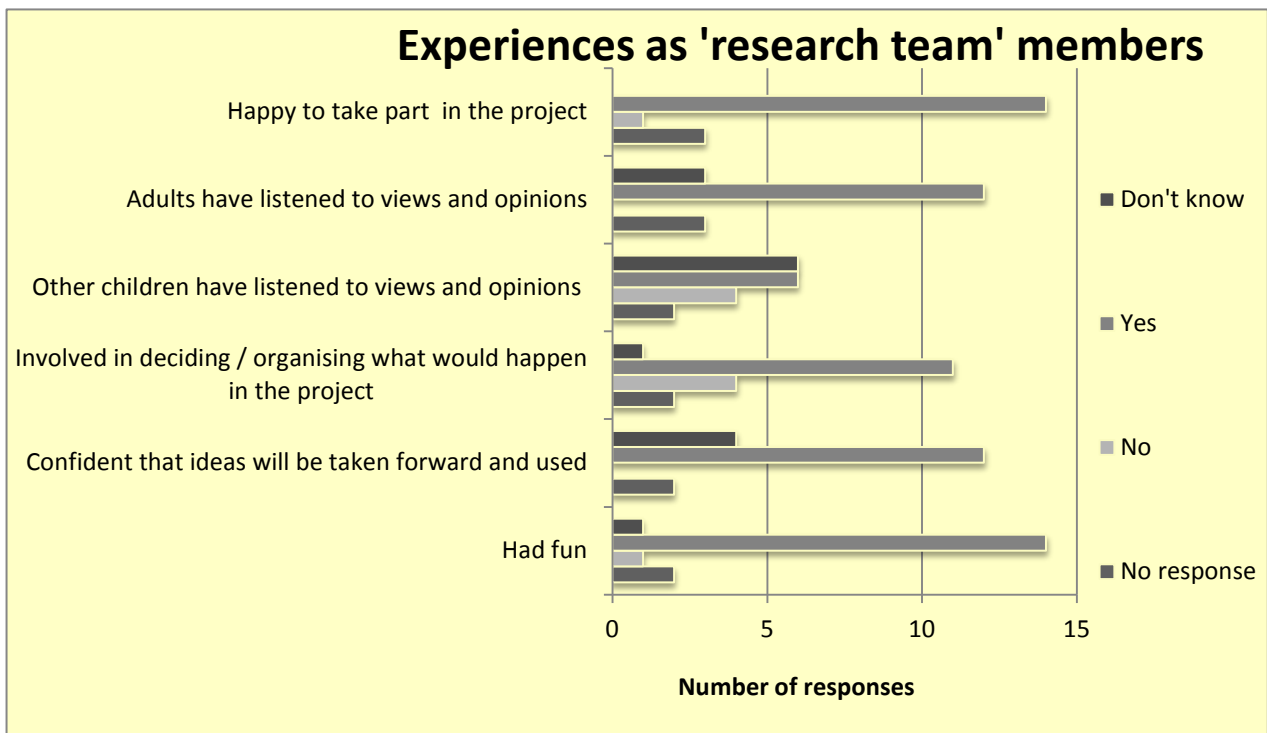The responses are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Pupil expereinces as a member of the research team

Responses suggest that on the whole pupils were happy to take part in the project and had fun in their role as a member of the research team. Two thirds of the respondents felt that adults had listened to their views and felt confident that these would be taken forward and used to make the playground better. While this response is overwhelmingly positive, it is interpreted with caution in light of the potential for social desirability in responses to questionnaires. For example, the third of participants who failed to respond or responded 'don't know' to these questions may reflect a reservation to respond 'no'. The limitations of questionnaires as a method of data gathering mean that these responses cannot be followed up to test this hypothesis.

Responses were more variable regarding children's perceptions that other children had listened to their views and opinions. Qualitative feedback from the questionnaire may explain these results, as a number of pupils commented that some children had shouted and interrupted research team meetings. This may also explain, or partially explain, why a third of pupils felt that they had not been involved in deciding and organising what would happen in the project. This reflects a further challenge in participatory research, in which dynamics and disagreements between pupils can affect children's experience. The likelihood of these difficulties occurring may increase when adults encourage children's participation, agency and confidence to articulate their opinions, while reducing their own role in controlling, regulating or leading the process (Greig et al., 2014). On the other hand, this highlights a potential benefit of participatory methods, as pupils are required to learn to work together and demonstrate skills of tolerance, respect and compromise to achieve a positive outcome.

Conclusion

In summary, this paper provided an account of a small-scale research project that attempted to involve young people as active participants in the redesign of their school playground, highlighting the value, but also the challenges of participatory work in education. This research is thought to be of benefit and relevance to EP practice for a number of reasons. Firstly, this research reflected the enactment of professional and ethical values in practice, through the measures taken both to advocate children's participation within the research and also to listen and respond to children's voices (Mercieca & Mercieca, 2014). This promotes children's rights (United Nations, 1989), preferences and needs, which can be overlooked within practice and when decisions are made regarding the spaces with which they occupy (Evans, 2001; Thomson, 2007). Secondly, this project provides an example of an alternative approach to responding to concerns regarding children's behaviour, which reflects a more extensive consideration of the impact of the physical environment than is evident in previous published accounts of EP research and practice (Briggs, MacKay & Miller, 1995; Roderick, Pitchford & Miller, 1997). Finally, while the demands of participatory research with children are recognised as challenging in light of the time pressures within with EPs often work, this research offers an example of a novel approach to producing change at an organisational level. Such opportunities may be increasingly possible in light of the changing nature of EP practice and the continued growth of the traded model of service delivery.

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