CHAPTER 5

SPACES FOR PLAY: INTERGENERATIONAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OF AN URBAN PARK IN THE EAST MIDLANDS OF ENGLAND

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ABSTRACT

Learning and development occur in many spaces both within and outside formal education settings. This chapter explores progress and possibilities of a knowledge exchange programme with a third sector organisation involved with community development, playwork and youth work in an urban area of the East Midlands. Theoretical concepts draw on a growing international interest in intergenerational play (Graves, 2002) and 'cultural circles' (Gill, 2020) as a method of challenging power and communication barriers between practitioners and families from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Using Foucault, post-structuralist feminism and autoethnography, as well as insight from a knowledge exchange partnership – the chapter offers a critique of a national initiative aimed at addressing 'holiday hunger' and community engagement. Practitioners in international contexts may benefit from the chapter's attempt to address a series of co-constructed questions that include:

1. How do we raise the profile of children's play as a non-negotiable starting point for universal service provision to children and young people?

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2. What can be done to 'connect' diverse communities living in close proximity and sharing amenities within urban areas?
3. How can we celebrate differences whilst designing universal services, which promote social cohesion through play and leisure spaces?

Keywords: Playwork; social justice; heterotopia; intergenerational; post-structuralism; cultural circles

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes local development of a national scheme known as the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme. The scheme provides funding to English local authorities (LAs) to commission out of school holiday time packages which incorporate healthy food, nutritional education, outdoor and physical activities, for children entitled to free school meals (Department for Education (DfE), 2022). The programme was piloted by play and youth organisations, including participants in the research explored in the chapter, between 2018 and 2022 and was rolled out in its present form in 2021. The guidance to LAs was updated in 2022 (DfE, 2022). The intention is to critique the programme within the context of playwork's underpinning values (Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group, 2005) which draw on the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UNICEF UK, 2022).

The chapter brings together theories and practices emerging from an ongoing knowledge exchange partnership between a third sector community play organisation and a higher education (HE) institution both located in England. The research represented in this account takes a post-structuralist stance and draws specifically on Foucault's (1994) notion of heterotopia as a gateway to reading spaces as socio-cultural as well as physical phenomena. The attraction of heterotopia as an epistemological tool is that it is cross disciplinary, for example, it is effectively used in urban planning (Dehaene & de Cauter, 2008) and early years' pedagogy (MacRae, 2011).

The chapter is organised into three parts. The first section considers HAF as a national mechanism directed towards tackling disadvantage and poverty in England. Sections in the middle part of the chapter think about the importance of play in the lives of children, young people, families and communities and the contribution of play theory to HAF delivery. Finally, attention is turned towards theorisation of the lived experiences of those tasked with implementing HAF through a multi-agency, voluntary sector youth, community and playwork organisation situated within an urban park which serves a diverse multi-ethnic population. This will (re)turn focus to the questions about the profile of play in England and ways in which this may promote social cohesion. I use the term (re)turn in order to assign a further conceptualisation of important questions which have been generated through the collaboration of academia with playwork practice through knowledge exchange.

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The names of services, institutions, places and individuals have been changed in order to protect privacy and confidentiality. This research convention is considered further under the heading *Play (work) through a post-structural feminist lens*.

THE HAF PROGRAMME

The HAF programme is a central government response to multiple layers of childhood deprivation and inequality in England. It has been running since 2018 and attempts to pull together agendas around obesity, lack of affordable childcare and youth services, educational underachievement and anti-social behaviour (DfE, 2022). The interventions are explicitly targeted at children claiming free school meals, who are entitled to a number of weeks of free attendance at 'organised out of school activities' during the Easter, Christmas and summer school holidays.

The funding for HAF projects is distributed by upper tier LAs, that is county councils and urban unitary authorities, in England and Wales. England is using a straightforward market economy model in which funds and guidance are sent by the UK government DfE to councils who are responsible for tendering out and monitoring the delivery (DfE, 2022). The Welsh parliament has implemented a slightly different model, which they promote as a partnership between the Welsh Government, Sport Wales and Public Health Wales (Scott, 2018). The Welsh Sports Association website (Scott, 2018) refers to the programme as the Health and Activity Fund rather than the Holiday Activity Fund, which may denote difference in education policy and differences in the status of playwork between England and Wales. Although the focus of this chapter is on policy and practice in England, highlighting some contrasts with its close neighbour, Wales is useful in considering the complexities and tensions inherent to initiatives such as HAF.

The English iteration of HAF is very much one of targeting services at children and families deemed to be living in poverty and/or social deprivation. Whilst the LA must ensure that the majority of their allocation goes to supporting families claiming specific benefits, which in turn entitles their children to free school meals, up to 15% can be used to award free places to 'children assessed by the local authority as being in need, at risk or vulnerable' (DfE, 2022, p. 6). In addition, the guidance imposes four key components of the offer, which are statutory and come under the DfE heading *Standards for holiday provision*. They are: food provision, enrichment activities, physical activities and food education (Round et al., 2022). The next section offers a critique of HAF as a top down, centrally funded project generated through an analyses of the English guidance to LAs which draws on the ethnography and knowledge exchange undertaken with community play exchange (CPE), the pseudonym for the outreach youth and play organisation located in the East Midlands of England.

CRITIQUING HAF

This section undertakes a critical discourse analysis of the government guidance to LAs, which are tasked with distributing the HAF funding (DfE, 2022), and

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then draws on ethnographic observation and discussion with the provider in the knowledge exchange partnership.

The HAF programme was designed, piloted and the work documented by play and youth service providers, located mainly in the third sector (voluntary and not-for-profit organisations). Once adopted by the English government, the allocation of funding and responsibilities for monitoring 'value for money' was devolved to LAs, whose own early years, childcare and youth services have been radically outsourced over the decade of conservative administration. The word playschemes is an umbrella term under which sits care provided on or off school site which is either wrapped around the school day (breakfast and after school clubs) or set up during the school holidays. Playschemes and playwork take place in a wide range of settings including school premises; community buildings, church halls and adventure playgrounds (King, 2021). They are regulated by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and can claim funding from government and from the third sector. This has created an internal market in which those running the playschemes, must bid to the LAs in which their programmes operate (many of those bidding are former LA employees) and supplement this with tendering for additional sources of revenue from other funders (Ball, 2021).

It is noteworthy that the HAF has been designed by the DfE, distinguishing its remit from New Labour's Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and the now obsolete Sure Start initiative which '… did seem to recognise that education is entangled in a set of other compounding inequalities' (Ball, 2021, p. 163). There is no mention of play in the DfE information (2022), but there is repeated use of language such as 'enrichment activities', 'organised activities' and 'food preparation' (the latter evocative of industrial catering rather than children participating in their cultural heritage through cooking with family or friends).

HAF, appears to prioritise the UNCRC's commitment to educational equality (articles 28 and 29) over and above article 31, children's right to 'to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities' (UNICEF UK, 2022). In sharp contrast, the right to leisure, play and culture which lies at the heart of the Playwork principles (Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group, 2005) forms the basis of much playwork theory and practice in playscheme provision (King & Newstead, 2018). This represents a rift, or at the very least a disputed territory, between the philosophical underpinnings of political agendas and those of youth and playworkers tasked with delivering them (Shaw, 2021). The importance of community-based play and its positioning within HAF is considered next.

THE POSITIONING OF PLAYWORK WITHIN HAF

There is a substantial body of literature which supports the importance of play as part of child development (Frost et al., 2007). What is being argued here is that the attack on children's play from the adult world is twofold: firstly, that it is increasingly associated with early childhood education to the detriment of middle childhood and adolescence and secondly that the adult world's preoccupation

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with work and global economic development has eroded the spaces which enable play and playful interactions, especially in urban areas. This troubles the North American notion of 'play deprivation' (Frost, 2010) whilst recognising childhood as a social construction with significant cultural variation (LeVine et al., 2008). There is a growing international interest in playwork as a distinct area of work with children and young people. Azevodo (2020) attracting contributions from researchers in a variety of fields from Australia, Hong Kong, England, Wales, Japan, Fiji and the United States.

Playwork, an area of youth work which has developed from the adventure playground movement in the United States (Brown, 2015), claims a unique set of skills and dispositions, which are enmeshed with the professional and political discourses of other institutions for social good including health services, education and youthwork. Playwork is subject to the same regimes of power, and human social and political entanglements with neo-liberal policies and institutions (Cremonesi, 2016) identified by Foucault in works such as *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison* (Foucault & Sheridan, 1991). I am suggesting that both the concept of knowledge exchange and ethnographic curiosity about social enactments in local spaces, especially those shared by children, young people and adults, have a contribution to make in uncovering and articulating pedagogical practices on the margins, and often away from dominant educational homilies. Parks are places for leisure and relaxation, games and passing the time, they are also free to access spaces which set them apart from other leisure spaces where one must pay either at the point of use or through some sort of subscription or membership fee. Parks also have the potential to free children's play from adult concerns around therapy and/or development (King & Newstead, 2018).

The knowledge exchange partnership with CPE is based around interdisciplinarity and dialogue within and between academia and practice (from the perspective of service users as well as deliverers). It has the potential to be productive of more nuanced understandings and therefore a widening of the repertoire for (re)action in pursuit of social justice. By (re)action I mean the combining of learning from past experiences and performing reflexively in the moment (Garnett & Vanderlinden, 2011). It is underpinned by a common commitment to the playwork principles (Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group, 2005) which welcomes professional dialogue, critique and interpretation of play and playwork in a community venue.

In practice, the 'open access' play in the park is much more fluid and wider ranging than suggested by the narrow target driven HAF agenda, which continues to rely on free school meals and benefit entitlements as a blunt tool for separating who should participate for free and who must pay to be part of the holiday play.

The political landscape of play and Playwork in Wales contrasts with that of its next-door neighbour, England. The Welsh Assembly has commissioned a three-year play sufficiency assessment backed up by research and the appointment of 'play sufficiency lead officers' in Welsh LAs (King & Howard, 2021). Through interviews with the play sufficiency officers, King and Howard found that collaborative partnerships were important, with changing policy and the

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unpredictability of funding streams a challenge. However, the model empowers dialogue between legislators and those working in play spaces, which is not facilitated in England (King & Howard, 2021).

CPE operates (and values) open access play and outreach youth and community work. They function from a range of venues across the East Midlands which is one of the nine principal regions of Englands; neglected youth and community buildings, local parks, town halls and a mobile youth bus parked up in pub car parks and other spaces frequented by local residents. In other words, their work and interactions with children and families are responsive to the different contexts of urban and small-town life in the English Midlands. The work is complex, more than child minding or entertaining children when they are not at school. This is not to suggest that caring for children as a paid or unpaid work is unskilled or undemanding, rather the opposite. The idea that working with children is easy or menial labour is a dominant discourse which should be resisted within social theory (Burman, 2021). Even so, no single organisation, or even occupation, can solve entrenched and multi-dimensional issues of poverty, discrimination and social exclusion in the way that HAF tries to suggest. Organisational ethnography, whatever form the writing about it takes, involves a tension between complexity and mundane, every day practices; lucidity in relation to the type of observations used by ethnographers is shaped in hindsight (Ybema et al., 2009) by revisiting fieldnotes and then (re)structuring them (writing up) these aide memoires to conversations, sensations, critical incidents and in the moment interpretations of what has been seen or said. There is a requirement to convey interlinking histories seen from multiple perspectives. This is the realm of philosophical, theoretical, ontological, epistemological, phenomenological and corporal entanglements into which ethnographers insert themselves.

In post-structural wrestling with this density of interpretation and representation the unsurmountable obstacles to anything approaching objective truths are often presented as *ruptures* (Derrida, 1978). Derrida is probing Husserl's schism between genesis and structure, both of which are simultaneously the building blocks and the obstacles to human understanding of first-hand experience. I envisage it as a brick wall protecting a private garden. By removing a specific brick, it is possible to catch a glimpse of 'the differences' which exist outside. Relating this to scientific method in the social sciences Derrida (1978) suggest the danger of 'an abusive investigation which introduces beforehand what it seeks to find …' (p. 193). Ethnography attempts to enter the space between the genesis and the resulting structures in order to 'perform' phenomenology, which allows for situated understandings of a social (human) dilemma, thereby generating new questions (unapproachable from behind the garden wall).

In my own research and knowledge exchange relationship with CPE what I hope to contribute is not answers to specific questions or even truth(s) but co-created possibilities for more socially just enactments of Playwork practices at a local level. Let me attempt to give an example from the ethnography of this play between genesis and structure:

Rory (one of the founders of CPE) worked with an innovative detached youth work project in the 1970s. One of the tools developed as part of this charity sector

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open access service to local children and young people was the concept of 'street games' or 'street sport' (StreetGames UK, 2021), which was adopted by the City Council youth service for which Rory worked (Podyma, n.d.). Immediately a tension is fashioned between the term games and the alternative signifier, sports. The rupture (for Rory) was when the City Council (and therefore his role within it) was dismantled and a few years later the organisation 'Street Games' was founded and bought back in by the City Council. This is an example of a neo-liberal pattern of 'cherry picking' and then outsourcing knowledge, which tends to lead to a constant reinventing of established services and a devaluing of local understanding. It is a representation of the tensions between third sector philanthropy, social democracy, a mixed economy of welfare and privatisation of local services within a globalised economy.

The third sector project was subsumed, absorbed into a much larger structure, where the genesis of street games remains as a sort of social haunting (Derrida & Kamuf, 1994; Gordon, 2008) in an academic book from researchers in contact with the original projects (Collins (Great Britain Department for Culture, Media and Sport), 2014), other texts designed for students and those qualified in youth, 'childcare' and education work (Rogers, 2011) and a UK organisation called 'StreetGames' (StreetGames UK, 2021) which has attracted a large amount of HAF funding but puts its emphasis on sport not play. This is not to say that sport is not important in the lives of many children and young people, but it is adult directed, a discipline not a freedom and it produces a fissure with the underpinning values of Playwork. Playwork has something different to offer to children, young people and their communities than sport.

Both sport and play have their genesis well before the modern era. In England their inception has been studied in relation to pre- and post-industrial popular culture and pastimes (Griffin, 2005). It is interesting that Griffin begins her examination of games played in the streets and squares of provisional English towns between 1660 and 1750, with an account from the 1860s. A man called George Tate recalls how children's play; marbles, skipping, chase games and also games specific to the Northumberland town he is remembering seemed to have disappeared (Griffin, 2005, p. 56). Of course, he is writing about his experience as a school 'BOY' at a time when those educated at school were exclusively white, male and middle class and there is a ghosting of the experiences of girls and those obliged to work for a living from an early age. Griffin goes on to point out that streets, especially market squares were regarded by the authorities and the populace as legitimate spaces for leisure activities. Replace market squares with parks and there might be something to be carried forward into the twenty-first century.

Two important developments emanating, in part, from Playwork research/practice and related disciplines are here termed 'intergenerational play' and 'cultural circles'. These are models which are beginning to speak to the spectres of Street Games, Universal outreach play and the type of community work which CPE attempts to embody.

There is growing evidence to suggest that the changing demographics of western societies is increasing the relevance of intergenerational practices in social spaces (Vieira & Sousa, 2016). In attempting to stimulate conceptualisation of

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what they call Intergenerational practice (IGP) Vieira and Sousa (2016) suggest that IGP should be used (and thereby understood) as a tool for promoting better co-operation between generations. They identify three layers of intergenerational programme; ones that simply bring the generations together to promote better understanding of one another; those which additional identify a problem such as dementia or mental health and others which have a secondary external goal such as environmental improvement. Perhaps turning the gaze away from age related 'difference' and onto spaces in which multigenerational contact occurs through more arbitrary or subjective social encounters could be productive of a fourth category of more playful IGP.

As previously explored, The Welsh Assembly has a less targeted approach to funding children's play than the English government. This, perhaps, is enabling of organisations which have a desire to embrace Playwork principles (Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group, 2005) whilst contributing to wider social and community cohesion. Thomas Lane et al. (2021) describe a community-visioning process culminating in the growth of intergenerational play (natural play and unstructured playing) in a park in Wales. This is a model which CPE are starting to actualise in their East Midland venues. As part of the research for this chapter, I visited one such project, partially funded and actively supported by CPE in a smaller town approximately 45 miles from East Green Park.

The project was set up seven years ago with Royal Voluntary Service (RVS, 2022) funding as part of a 'Local People's Project'. Maisie, a retired teacher, was volunteering at a residential home but agreed to take on the establishment of an over 50s club for isolated older people. This was to be run from a former youth club which had been rebranded as a 'Children and Young People Zone' (CYZ) following LA outsourcing of youth services.

This (for Maisie and Rory) was the genesis of an intergenerational holiday play project. On the day of my visit, the venue has been moved to the town hall, which is more central than the CYZ, although not so well designed and equipped for the purposes. The CYZ is located in an outlying part of the town, labelled as 'deprived'. One gentleman is talking with a local genealogist, tracing his family history from photographs and documents. There are craft activities set out ready and a card game is initiated by a volunteer, some people are colouring. A mother arrives with two children and they circulate and chat until others, of all ages are joining the groups. Maisie tells me that they do not link with early years' centres because there are too many regulations. One of the most successful sessions to date (at the CYZ) was a games afternoon led by a youth worker. There were silly games suited to all abilities and teams were formed giving just enough competitiveness for the occasion. The next planned event is for a trip to the seaside with the over fifties club members and local families (including grandparents).

This group and the spaces they inhabit is different from the East Green Park community. It is mainly white and female led, the family history participant is the husband of one of the women who regularly attends the club. Maisie comments on the convention of women driving forward opportunities for social connection. There is some resistance to the idea of being seen generically as grandparents

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(some are and some are not) and the intergenerational play is not the primary purpose of the over 50s club.

Some of the threads from the RVS collaboration feeds back into the East Green Park endeavours, there are reciprocal echoes back and forwards with CPE and the knowledge exchange project. They are connected by human mediation not shared physical, social or economic configuration, but local variations are significant. The ambition for the East Green Park collaboration is to introduce 'Cultural Circles' (Gill, 2020), which bring together old and young, privileged and disadvantaged, the powerful and those who feel that they do not have a voice, those who live their lives in a locality and those who enter it in a 'professional capacity'. They (cultural circles) are a way of acknowledging and addressing head on the way in which racial (and other prejudices) continue to 'meddle' with our best intentions of contributing to making diverse multi-cultural/racial/lingual/cultural spaces more equitable (Race et al., 2022). This iteration of 'cultural circles' was employed in early childhood education settings as part of the 'Children Crossing Borders Project' (Tobin et al., 2013) but like all useful interventions which combine theory and social practice it has taken on a life (and an intersectionality) which spurs a multi-disciplinary application to decolonising curricula in nurseries, schools and universities (Race et al., 2022). It also has potential to influence more socially just pedagogies outside of formal education spaces. The idea as it is forming within the knowledge exchange project with CPE is that revival of memories of childhood 'street games' shared between older adults and younger people will be the cultural artefact which opens the way to dialogue. It is important to stress that the delivery relies on a strong partnership between academics, practitioners and community activists (used in the widest sense of the word to include children and young people themselves) with the widest possible breadth of cultural representation.

Before concluding I wish to divert attention towards two additional constructs of intergenerational and space related theory/practice, in the form of intergenerational contact zones (ICZ) and Everyday Utopia.

PLAY(WORK) THROUGH A POST-STRUCTURAL FEMINIST LENS

The knowledge exchange relationship between myself as an academic and the directors, staff, volunteers and families at CPE draws on some of the methodology of the classic Chicago School ethnography (Deegan, 2001) employed by Venkatesh (2006). It is not possible (and probably neither ethical nor desirable) for a female sociology of childhood lecturer to attempt to live in the community or work for the organisation being studied. The aim is not only to document the changing lived experiences by taking some part in them but also to interrogate how adults and children enact open access play and Playwork in particular spaces in England. There is no withdrawal from the field in order to write up and publish findings. Instead, the quest is for an ongoing dialogue between theory

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and practice; epistemology and ontology; the academy and the public services represented by CPE. There is an intention to make the familiar strange in order to call out taken for granted assumptions about policy and delivery of community development work and to co-generate new questions thereby opening up new possibilities for social pedagogy (Cameron & Moss, 2011) and social justice.

Heterotopia are spaces of difference whose resistance to interpretation can force us to face, and stutteringly articulate, the limits of our understanding of social spaces (MacRae, 2011). In previous publications I have more fully explored the characteristics of heterotopia as simultaneously real and imagined emplacements (Foucault & Faubion, 2000) in the context of early years' settings and out of school provision (Shaw, 2017) and as a concept for understanding Playwork more generally (Shaw, 2023). The remainder of the chapter will consider how play taken into shared public spaces might be reconceptualised as a phenomenon equally important in childhood and adulthood with the potential to interfere with the intersectional obstacles of age, ethnicity, gender and social class.

The focus, or perhaps more accurately the theoretical lens, through which the work is presented, uses an autoethnographic gaze applied to spaces occupied by both adults and children as distinct sociological categories of person and personhood. An underpinning thread is that of agency and ways in which it might be denied and then reclaimed by groups such as younger children, adolescents, older people and those who work with them in 'caring professions' including playwork, youth work and community development.

As an auto-ethnographer, turning to heterotopia as a methodological frame facilitates engagement with complex and competing socio-political discourses about what it is to be young or older, a child or young person, a pupil or professional, a worker or a volunteer. It is a potential tool for articulating matters of social justice because it pays attention to the multiple voices which set out to define, problematise and address the complexities of twenty-first century social institutions. I use the term institutions to include all public spaces; schools, universities, parks, workplaces and the tensions engendered when they are conceived as isolated from 'private space' (if such a thing exists) of family, home and community.

A key goal of post-structuralist feminism (McNay, 1992) is seeking those voices which are barely audible beneath the dominating interpretations of politicians, mainstream media and patriarchal essentialisms (Spivak, 1993). In other words, there is an attempt to make visible the tensions and entanglements between power and knowledge. The ethnographic field work, which forms a central tenet of the academic contribution to the knowledge exchange, has exposed strains between government policies and ideologies in England and underpinning principles of play and youthwork professionals delivering agendas around poverty, families and communities.

The names of people, organisations and places have been changed as is the convention in traditional ethnography. This is the case even where locations are a matter of public record and free public access. In this way the fictionalised appellations are also a device designed to generate instability in what might constitute 'truth' or 'fiction', 'fact' or 'imagination', historical record and/or the ethnographic author's observation.

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RECONCEPTUALISING PLAYWORK IN ENGLAND: CO-CREATION OF RESEARCH AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

I first engaged with heterotopic research in my PhD (Shaw, 2017) as a way of making the familiarity of early years' settings, in which I worked as a development officer and teacher consultant, strange to me. The quest, which has seeped out from the catalyst of the thesis, into other spaces in which I explore competing theories and practices associated with pedagogy and play, is to consistently keep in mind that complexity is 'perhaps the most important theoretical statement of our time' (Gordon, 2008, p. 3).

Stuart Lester points out that children's play has been particularly associated with the terms 'Playwork' and early years (care and education) (Lester, 2020) but is also highly influenced by other professions such urban planners, the police, and politicians. I would add to this the local community in which other types of official and unofficial caring (of older people, those with disabilities or physical or mental health challenges) take place, often unrecognised by those who hold the purse strings. The key points that Lester (2020) is making are that professional workforces tend to be under pressure to plan and justify play, to make it fit targets associated with child development (Burman, 2021) or political priorities. However, 'that all adults affect children's opportunity to play' and furthermore 'children have considerable power in negotiating conditions for playing and the material environment is not passive in the process' (Lester, 2020, p. 35).

In analysing such spaces, I have found it helpful (maybe even necessary) to seek out and problematise these socially constructed oppositions between work and play; adulthood and childhood; learning and development; education and schooling. Or, as Foucault's (1994) essay on heterotopia would have it, the oppositions which are ingrained in institutions and practices and are taken as unquestionable 'between private space and public space, between the family space and social space, between cultural space and useful space, between the space of leisure activities and the space of work' (p. 177). In short, in order to better understand spaces and the social practices which inhabit them it is necessary to take into account the objects we bring into them, where we place these artefacts, how we interact with them and the historical contexts through which they have been awarded a right 'to belong' there. In order to illustrate this, I am going to consider the past and present of East Green Park and the cultural references being redeveloped by CPE and Playwork more generally.

English municipal parks were established in parallel with the industrialisation and urbanisation of the nineteenth century. They gave/give local populations free access to green spaces for the purposes of recreation, constructive use of leisure time and socialisation in perpetuity (Conway, 1991). Conway (1991) points out that they were meant to attract all sections of society to a shared social space where different social classes could '… learn from each other. In this process it was tacitly agreed that certain sections of society were more in need of improvement than others' (Conway, 1991, p. 3). A targeted service masquerading as a universal one, it might be argued.

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East Green Park (as we are calling it here) was opened in 1909, at the very end of the public parks' movement (Conway, 1991) making it Edwardian rather than Victorian and originally had the title 'Recreation Ground' not park (Friends of Normanton Park, 2021). The city (which was only a town at the time, gaining the status of city in 1977) already had a park gifted to it by a local Mill owner in 1882 but this had restricted access in the sense that there was an entrance fee to pay except on Wednesdays (traditionally a half day for shop workers in Britain) and Sundays (Conway, 1991; Derby Parks, 2022). I was told on a field visit to CPE that in the present day East Green Park is much safer than its illustrious predecessor (which we could call Wood End Pleasure Park) (see Fig. 2), possibly because it is smaller and surrounded by residential streets and local shops and is well used by joggers, walkers, parents, grandparents, friends, clubs and societies, throughout the day and into the evening.

Conway (1991) gives a full and fascinating historical overview of Victorian Parks and the park movement in Britain, including historical images of Wood End Pleasure Park, which is said to have influenced Olmsted, the designer of Central Park in New York (Derby Parks, 2022). However, my purpose is to reconceptualise the space in relation to heterotopic features, which might allow alternative readings of East Green Park and its potential for community co-creation in the present.

Foucault (1994, p. 180) hypothesises that a central element of heterotopic spaces is that their contemporary operation is 'haunted' (Derrida & Kamuf, 1994;



Fig. 1. Track Photo. Photo taken by Linda Jane Shaw.

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Gordon, 2008) by past iterations of their social purpose(s). East Green is now called a park but continues to operate very much as a 'recreation ground', with a bowling green (associated with older residents), gym equipment and cricket nets (for those in early and middle adulthood) and play equipment designated specifically for young children. During the height of the pandemic a walking/running track was marked out giving distances travelled around the circular path (see Fig. 2).

This segregation of areas calls to mind another of Foucault's heterotopic principles: 'The heterotopia has the ability to juxtapose in a single real place several emplacements that are incompatible in themselves' (Foucault, 1994, p. 181). There is a disciplining of the space which conforms to the prejudices of an absent park planner (or park planning committee). It means that particular groups can claim exclusive access to specific spaces, denying access to other groups, for example, children over a certain age using the play equipment and those under a certain age having free use of the cricket nets. I am not saying that there are not good reasons for having some rules or controls, only that leaving these unquestioned cancels out other possibilities, particularly in terms of facilitating more equitable (and universal) social interactions. On one occasion my field notes reveal the 'whiteness' of the café, as a space within the wider milieu of the park and its surrounding community (Shaw, 2023, pp. 52–68). Like many of the recreation grounds of the time (Conway, 1991), East Green Park has a number of different entrances with large Victorian and Edwardian properties on one side and poorer neighbourhoods (and a busy road) on the other side (see Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Houses Surrounding the Park. Photo taken by Linda Jane Shaw.

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What has noticeably changed is the ethnic diversity of the area with both middle class and more modest housing occupied by a large British South Asian heritage community. The co-generation of research questions and collaborative research practices with CPE attempts to take into account ways in which Community Playwork may have the capacity to confront some of these complex enactments of unintentional 'apartheidness'.

Starting from an interest in young people living life at the margins in a deprived area of Chicago, Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh's ethnography uncovered a vibrant black market (or bartering network) which sustained an 'underground economy of the urban poor' (Venkatesh, 2006). In his fieldwork Venkatesh reports frequently finding himself in the position of mediator in disputes or negotiations over payments in cash or kind. Organisations such as CPE find themselves in a similar position in securing, developing and delivering services in English communities represented here by the East Green Park area. On one occasion a youth worker, who is part of the CPE team in East Green Park, tells me how he has reached out to a group of Roma youths who had been vandalising empty park buildings (see Fig. 3). It was explained that the buildings had been acquired by CPE to provide better community venues and activities. They gave their suggestions on how the buildings could be developed and the facilities they would like to use in the park. The graffiti and other damage stopped. It is not possible to run the playschemes in isolation from surrounding community networks and performances of social (and anti-social) groupings in public spaces.

From a top-down viewpoint CPE might appear to be typical in its conformity to Western regimes of homogeneous power structures. Older white males in management positions, young male youth workers and female play and youth leaders delivering programmes to younger children and their families. Ethnographically



Fig. 3. Park Buildings.

Photos taken by Linda Jane Shaw.

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there are many instances of resistances and deviances from within the organisation. There is a conscious policy of employing and training Playworkers representative of the communities in which the organisation is commissioned to work. On one level this might be understood as simple good practice in meeting equality and diversity codes. When the dynamics of the interactions within the teams, between the playworkers and the community and with the research/knowledge exchange process are experienced, it becomes a little clearer how productive the seemingly non-consequential minutia of working in play might be to contributing to a more socially just society.

I am visiting CPE at East Green Park at a time when the children are in school. The CEO is showing me the improvements that have been made to the building and surrounding environment since I last saw it. The team of three youth and community workers, a PhD student employed as a research assistant and a work experience student mill around engaged in various tasks and exchanges of information in preparation for the arrival of families later in the day. I am chatting to them informally, getting to know their names, roles and backgrounds and gradually a tea break is constituted and everyone sits together, informally on seats and bean bags to one side of the play space. Two young women dominate the conversation about their work, they are clearly passionate about their role and bounce off of each other with jokes and ideas about the organisation and possibilities for research and development. One is gay, of Black British heritage and an accomplished rugby player, the other is white and more artistically inclined. This is only a moment in time, it will not solve ingrained issues of racism, sexism and poverty, but perhaps it is a potent element in constructing an everyday Utopia (Cooper, 2014).

ICZ are 'place-based strategies for promoting social inclusion and belonging' (Kaplan et al., 2020). A number of international contributors to the body of knowledge and experience of ICZ take urban parks and recreation as their theme. There is the lake side park in China where people dance in the evenings, harmonising with the natural landscape and welcoming visitors and local people 'of all ages and backgrounds' (O'Neill, 2020). Then there is the transformation of urban parks in Portugal described in Azevedo's case studies.

These beautiful portrayals of completed park projects might seem like utopian impossibilities to anyone with a deficit mindset viewing the physical environment of East Green Park from an English perspective, but they do speak to the possibility of transformation. I say this because services targeted specifically at those 'in need' emanate from discourses of vulnerability, labelling and welfare which themselves construct a systemic deficit model of childhood (Woodhead, 1997) of ageing and of community. In many ways the work carried out in East Green Park by CPE is made up of an infinite number of small resistances. This takes us back to the concept of cultural circles which draws on Freire's perception of education 'as the practice of freedom – as opposed to education as the practice of domination' (Freire & Ramos, 1996, p. 62) and the pedagogy of Playwork. Heterotopia are spaces in which the real and the imaginary co-exist and it is this which leads me to perceive them as locations in which peaceful revolutions can (and do) take place. This brush with 'Utopian studies' (Cooper, 2014; Gordon, 2018) points towards the possibility of East Green Park, and similar urban youth projects as 'everyday utopia' (Cooper, 2014).

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Cooper (2014, p. 2) frames everyday utopia as 'networks and spaces that perform regular daily life, in the global North in a radically different fashion'. Cooper goes on to discuss these networks and spaces as active examples of replacing dominant practices (such as HAF, organised competitive sport for children and devaluing of learning which takes place outside of schools). I have explored the parallels with working with children in more depth in the chapter 'Clambering through every day utopian Playwork' (Shaw, 2023, pp. 69–81). Cooper's examples include a naked ballet and a nudist bike ride in London in 2011; a woman's trans bathhouse and A. S. Neill's Summerhill School. There is no doubt that Summerhill is of closest pertinence to Playwork, nakedness might be a step too far in an East of England provincial park. However, the key equivalence is the temporal existence of play spaces as locations from which to critique and enact practices differently. They are not perfect spaces but rather settings in which the politics which manifest in all endeavours for social good can be played out at a more conscious level and therefore on a more equitable (pun intended) playing field.

The questions which initiated the chapter have no definitive answers, rather they symbolise the shadows of concern identified by practitioners as attached to their working lives with children and young people. As such they are inherently worthy of research attentiveness. I have no doubt that as a fluid and dynamic knowledge exchange partnership we will return to them many times in the coming years, both in connection with HAF which is due to run until 2025 and other funding streams and initiatives. CPE continue to raise the profile of children's play through the nature of their work and dissemination at professional events and networking. Hopefully this chapter and future academic publications will also make a contribution. The HAF funding does not encourage or support the provision of universal services, this an underpinning value of CPE and similar playwork organisations and playworkers themselves. Perhaps the best that can be promised is that such organisations, and individuals within them, continue to strive to create *every day utopias* (Cooper, 2014) which meet the aspirations of the communities and spaces in which they work. In this way, we might witness a better connecting of diverse communities and promote more visible social cohesion.

FURTHER POSSIBILITIES FOR INTERNATIONAL CONTEXTS OF URBAN CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

The concepts of heterotopia, intergenerational play, ICZs, cultural circles and everyday utopia are all developing theories with the power to bring about more equitable community-based play in urban environments. They are not the only ways, nor are they any sort of blueprint for 'quality' which is itself a social construct (Dahlberg et al., 2013). Instead, they are a way into more creative ideas for shaping socially just enactments of work (and play) with children and young people on their own terms and within their own communities. Post-structuralism makes no claims about 'fixing' problems or answering specific questions, rather

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the opposite in that it recognises the impossibility of reaching universal solutions to complex, multi-dimensional social disparities. Its attraction for me in my ethnographic and knowledge exchange struggles are that it better enables me to see more deeply by making me appreciate the strangeness of my own assumptions about work with others and 'the other' in relation to age, gender, ethnicity, religious belief and so forth. It also helps me to better articulate, share and hand over possible resolutions to those better placed to see them through.

The co-enunciated niggles about the need for universal play services instead of the target approach currently dominating English policy; whether the term holiday hunger is discriminatory; how to raise the profile of children's play and what can be done to connect communities and celebrate differences in a spirit of social cohesion, are not research questions in the traditional sense. Instead, they are starting points that shine a light on concerns held by a (partly imagined but sometimes real) cooperative of academics, Playworkers, children, families and communities to continue to generate questions of importance to us/them/others.

The aim in putting together the chapter has never been about telling anyone the best way to 'do' community development or Playwork. I owe a great deal of thanks to CPE and all of the people within their organisation who have taken the time to talk to me about the work (both paid and voluntary). I know that it is their hope, as well as my own, that you have enjoyed reading about our collaborations and dreams for the future. If you take something of your own from it, if you agree, disagree, borrow or remould some of the ideas even better. Most of all we would wish that you continue the conversations in your own countries, cities, neighbourhoods or networks.

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