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# Participating together: dialogic space for children and architects in the design process

Joanna Birch, Rosie Parnell, Maria Patsarika and Maša Šorn

School of Architecture, The University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK

## ABSTRACT

Typically enmeshed in the 'voice' perspective within children's participation debates, there are currently sporadic insights into designer-child creative dialogue. Drawing on the findings of a Leverhulme Trust-funded research project, this paper articulates moments of dialogue between architects and children in spatial design processes, whose spatial and symbolic qualities help to understand the interactions and meeting of cultures. Several authors have discussed the transformational potential for adults and children to 'co-author' identities in dialogical contexts. The paper builds on this body of research to suggest that design dialogue offers the space, literally and metaphorically, for children and architects to participate together. Identifying the qualities of the dialogic design space as potentially present in children's and adults' everyday cultures and interdependent relations, it is proposed that this dialogical framework might diversify architects' and children's roles in the design process and enrich practices and perceptions of design participation.

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## 1. Introduction

Is children's participation a way to create a more democratic world?

Or is it a way to simply create better places for children?. Francis and Lorenzo (2002, 166–167)

The field of children's participation includes an established critical discourse, which has problematized adult-child dialogue (e.g. Cooke and Kothari 2001; Badham 2004; Weil et al. 2005), questioning the extent of reciprocity in such meaning-making explorations. Percy-Smith (2006), for example, argues that 'young people tend to "participate" as a group apart from adults, which reinforces their separation from adults in the everyday spaces of their communities' (154–155). He questions 'why too often nothing changes after young people have their say' (Percy-Smith 2006, 158). Framing children's inputs as 'voice' has similarly been viewed as problematic, even when underpinned by an acknowledgement of children as capable and rightful decision makers; powerful, agenda-setting adult voices often rendering children and young people's voices void (Cooke and Kothari 2001; Kraftl 2013). Situating voice in an educational context, Fielding (2007, 306) acutely expresses the limitations of such a framework for children's participation:

'Voice' has too much about it that smacks of singularity, of presumed homogeneity, of deferential dependence on the unpredictable dispensations of those who deftly tune the acoustics of the school to the frequencies of a benign status quo.

**CONTACT** R. Parnell  rosie.parnell@northumbria.ac.uk

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Arguably, therefore, children's 'voice' evokes one-way communication – it is *informative*, 'an engine for improvement', as Halsey et al.'s (2006) title suggests, informing decision-making processes and organizational practices owned by adults. At the same time, the adult voice is here reminiscent, we argue, of a *didactic* understanding of children's participation sustained by a long-standing tradition of developmental theories that view learning as a pursuit specifically for the young. Whether seen as learners, 'clients' whose insights are sought for service improvement or, indeed, citizens in their own right, children's agency is usually regarded as a distinct entity, co-existing with adults' agency in a zero-sum power game (Hinton 2008).

In the realm of participatory design more specifically, creative<sup>1</sup> processes involving both children and designers have been discussed as a 'communicative action space' (Kemmis 2001, cited in Percy-Smith 2006, 168) or, a 'communicatory and visionary process' (Francis and Lorenzo 2002, 164). Along with recent research suggesting that children's own cultures and 'ways of being' are particularly conducive to creative exchanges with designers (Parnell 2011, 298; Parnell and Patsarika 2011), such understandings see difference supporting and enriching dialogic design participation contexts. Various researchers, for example, advocate that collaborative projects with children focus on the reciprocal change that may occur for both adults and children through dialogue, thus moving beyond the mono-perspective of children as 'experts in their own lives' (Blanchet-Cohen and Rainbow 2006, 122; Day, Sutton, and Jenkins 2011, 50). This perspective views design not as an instrumental process but as a 'situated social process' (McDonnell 2012, 61), where learning happens for both children and for designers.

Applying the term dialogue to conversations between architects and children can appear problematic (Parnell and Patsarika 2011). The perseverance of a product-focused design culture is reflected in literature that views user–designer interaction as a means to achieve a consensus-based understanding of design requirements and fulfilment of user needs (Luck 2003; McDonnell 2012). This type of interaction can be recognized in *dialectics*: 'a dynamic form of logic leading all apparent differences to be subsumed into identity in the form of a more complexly integrated synthesis' (Wegerif 2008, 350, after Bakhtin 1986). In other words conversation builds towards synthesis, the aim being to come eventually to a common agreement (Sennett 2012, 18). Whereas in dialectics difference represents contradiction and therefore needs to be overcome, *dialogue* sees difference between voices as *constituting* meaning (Wegerif 2008, 359), so that overcoming this difference would annul the whole point of dialogue. Dialogue, 'that world of talk which makes an open social space, where discussion can take an unforeseen direction' (Sennett 2012, 23) therefore retains difference as the basis for empathic cooperation, and holds the potential to expand the limits of participants' pre-defined roles and their understanding of one another. Dialectic cooperation, on the other hand, with its focus on sympathy and convergence, undermines this potential.

Since the design process has to fit the various time and regulatory limitations of a project, communication often has to be achieved rather than explored. Children's participation in spatial design is usually advocated and articulated through the admirable mantra of creating better places and products. However, this product focus can simultaneously overshadow the transformative potential of a reciprocal design process (Francis and Lorenzo 2002; Parnell, Cave, and Torrington 2008). As a consequence, the question of how a dialogic process between children and architects might affect the design process remains little studied.

Spatial design contexts particularly lend themselves to studying dialogue, with 'space' offering the freedom to both children and designers to mould their expressions of communication beyond the dominance of verbal and cultural convention. In this light, this paper aims to develop a framework of dialogic designer–child interactions. Explored in this way, design participation offers a context to problematize and rethink understandings of children's participation more broadly.

## 2. Research context

### 2.1. Methodology and methods

The paper draws on the findings of the three-year Leverhulme Trust-funded project 'Children transforming spatial design: creative encounters with children' (2013–2016). The research aimed to explore co-creative design dialogue between children and designers in live spatial design projects, with a focus on the dynamics and processes of designer–child interactions.<sup>2</sup> More specifically, the data discussed here link back to four case studies implemented in year two of the project:

- Wilderness Wood, East Sussex, UK: a woodland area, where a group of eleven children aged 5–12 spent a day taking part in the design process and hands-on construction of an outdoor shelter/kitchen with an architect (one-day workshop observed);
- Department store café, Cologne, Germany: a group of six children aged 5–12 worked alongside a team of architects in visioning the design of a children's area within the café they were working in. The second of two workshops, this process focused on various configurations and interpretations of different physical models made by the children and the architects (one-half-day workshop observed);
- Primary school, Tower Hamlets, London, UK: a pupil group of 13 children aged 6–11 created models for their school grounds design/redevelopment process during one workshop (one-half-day workshop observed), and;
- Primary school, Chania, Crete, Greece: the sixth grade (20 children aged 11) collaborated with a team of architects to develop designs and construct a library/book facility for their school. This was part of an ongoing three-year collaboration between the school and the architects to co-develop design ideas for the school grounds and internal spaces through re-use of materials (two-day workshop observed).

The research process involved a so-called focused ethnography (Knoblauch 2005), involving relatively short-term, but intensive multi-method data collection, underpinned by a conceptualization of children as competent social actors and interpreters of their worlds (Christensen and James 2008). The chosen methods reflected our desire to make explicit both designers' implicit knowledge as well as children's multiple languages and means of expression, verbal or embodied (Clark 2010; Mackey 2011).

Interaction in each case was captured through photographs and through filming the 'live' design and build activity, thus permitting detailed exploration of the communications. In addition to keeping ethnographic field journals and taking part in conversations 'in the field', two more formalized individual interviews were carried out with each of the six 'lead' architects across the four projects, plus one individual interview with a number of the children involved in each project (35 in total). Interviews with children were facilitated by visual methods as prompts for discussion, such as photographs taken by the children, storyboards and role play with figurines representing the designer–child interaction. Designers were also asked to reflect on their exchanges with children through design diaries, symbolic drawings and sketches.

Data were analysed qualitatively and thematically with the help of NVivo. All interviews and verbal interactions captured through video were transcribed and also translated where required, while key moments in the video recordings were analysed independently using Conversation Analysis (Goodwin and Heritage 1990).<sup>3</sup>

### 2.2. Analytical framework

Attempts to address the adult–child dynamics in children's participation are represented by various models of participation (e.g. Hart 1997; Shier 2001). Many of these models are inspired by Arnstein's

(1969) ‘ladder of citizen participation’, whose main tenet is that participation is meaningless without power distribution. Hart’s version (1997), for example, illustrates children’s participation as gradually ascending from ‘manipulation’, the lowest rung in his ladder, to ‘child-initiated, shared decisions with adults’; the highest rung, suggesting children’s protagonism. However useful these models are as a vehicle for discussing ‘pseudo’ and ‘genuine’ forms of participation, they nonetheless tend to prescribe participants’ intentions and assume the zero-sum conception of power in adult–child interactions. The above authors (e.g. Hart 1997; Shier 2001) are aware of their typologies’ limitations, acknowledging the potential to oversimplify and render participation a box-ticking exercise. More helpful for the purposes of this study, therefore, is to approach potentially dialogic processes with a view of power as an ever-changing dynamic (Gallagher 2008); not something which can be owned, but a process involving negotiation between individuals (Percy-Smith 2006, 154). Drawing on Linell (1998) we view child–designer interchanges in light of the dynamic interdependencies of these actors and embrace the various asymmetries in the children’s and designers’ understandings, knowledge and extent of engagement.

The critical frame for the analysis thus draws on both a literal and metaphorical understanding of what Lodge (2005, 134) perceives as ‘the *building* of a shared dialogue’ (own emphasis) and what Moss and Petrie (2002) refer to as ‘discursive space’ for young people; that is, an opening for a meaningful ‘coming together of different value systems of diverse actors in cooperation’ (Percy-Smith 2006, 173). In the analysis and interpretation that follows, we seek to articulate the qualities of the dialogic space in a design context, through investigation of *particular moments*, including observed and recorded encounters and participant reflections within the case studies. In order to identify relevant moments, we draw indicators that dialogue is ‘happening’ from expanded definitions of the concept established by various authors. Looking first at the etymology of the word: ‘dia’ in Greek means ‘through’ and ‘logos’ translates to ‘word’ or ‘meaning’ (Franck and von Sommaruga-Howard 2010, 103). Beyond the everyday understanding of dialogue as a conversation *between* two people, ‘dia’ signifies a ‘flow of meaning’ (Isaacs 1999, 19) *across* perspectives, cultures and value systems. In summary therefore, dialogue is here identified in interaction that is more than conversation or talk; where participants retain emergent tensions in their interactions, rather than aiming to persuade or ‘win’ others (Franck and von Sommaruga-Howard 2010, 10). Importantly, it is understood as a process with transformational potential for the individuals involved (Mannion 2010, 338), as well as for the design outputs themselves and includes the actions, words, silences, gestures and movements by which children and designers build a ‘shared narrative’ and ‘arrive to a point one would not get to alone’ (Lodge 2005, 134).

### 3. Dialogic design space

#### 3.1. Together, personal, functional

Much of what we here perceive as ‘dialogue’ is rooted in the simple act of architects and children coming together with an attitude or demeanour that allows them to relate to one another. The desire to be around children was a shared ethos for the case study architects and, often, a starting point for their collaboration, as this comment suggests: ‘I quite like being around children, because they talk to each other and it’s really interesting what they say to each other, so you can learn from what they think [...]’. It is interesting to note in passing that several architects’ reflections on working with adult clients or ‘users’ instead exuded scepticism about the extent of any collaboration likely to develop out of their interactions: ‘so many adults don’t have much access to their creativity [...] you do sometimes get adults who really like to get in there and get their hands mucky but they are a minority [...] adults tend to watch’. To this architect, a client’s hands-on presence in the design process was perceived to enhance their creative engagement in design dialogue. Another architect, speaking for her team of designers, described their collaboration with children as ‘the warmest experience we’ve had so far’, which she explained with the following:

[...] we had little glimpses of happiness, that they're here, shouting 'What are you going to do?'; 'How can I help?'; 'Give me something to do'. All this eagerness to help I think it was evident from day one, they like the fact that we literally take into account what they say and we want to have them next to us, either for helping, even talking, while we were trying to tie things together, say[ing] 'What do you think?'

To these architects, therefore, children's immediate and active response to the design process meant an opening of opportunities for dialogue. Besides their physical presence, however, it is their 'eagerness to help' that also facilitated dialogue. Across the various case studies, 'helping each other' emerged as a conscious, embodied experience for the children, which they understood as part and parcel of collaboration. Speaking about a photograph that she has chosen to take of the process, this girl explains:

I found it interesting, because I thought it was cool that Eli<sup>4</sup> and Zoe were working, were helping each other to carry a thing. They were helping each other to do something. And I thought that looked quite like, again like teamwork, just working together and getting on.

To help means to recognize the need for joint input in a specific work context. On the part of the person who is assisted, it also means to accommodate the other and allow difference to inform the joint effort. In this sense, making space for others to join in enabled children and architects to share moments of creative dialogue. For designers this often involved giving up control to permit children to contribute. One architect claimed that with children 'there is no façade', contrasting this with typical exchanges with adults where expectations concerning expert knowledge and professional status demanded a particular form of conduct. This lack of façade helps to build trust, she argued, and to ease the communication process with the children, allowing the exchange of ideas and perspectives to inform the design process. Importantly, another designer affirmed that working with children encourages him to try out ideas without the fear of making mistakes at a stage in the design when they will not negatively affect the remaining work.

Children and designers saw their relationship as embodied in an active demonstration of care, reciprocity and respect – key ingredients of dialogic processes. This architect recognizes that design dialogue is founded on a desire to understand, help and respond to the needs and perspectives of others. It is 'not as simple as getting the benefits out of working with children', he argued; 'we need to get into the psyche of the children and the people we are working with, understanding their needs and desires'. Based on this conviction, relating to one another thus requires empathy and attending intently to others (Sennett 2012, 21), which is born out of recognition of the collective effort in the collaboration process. This evokes what Fielding (2007, 387–388) understands as the 'conditions of personhood', inspired by John Macmurray and his person-centred radical philosophy:

[The] self is relational in a deeply mutual way [...]: the ground motive is heterocentric, that is to say, it is animated by concern for and care of the other person; second, the fact that its reciprocally conditioning principles are those of equality and freedom, treating one another as equals.

Relating to one another, Fielding continues, brings together the *functional* and the *personal*, where the functional in this case is represented by one girl's expression of 'getting on' with the design project, while the personal comes forth in expressions of togetherness such as 'helping' and 'working together' and an associated delight in each other.

### 3.2. Multimodal, competent, yet unfamiliar

Various theorists and researchers (e.g. Moss and Petrie 2002; Percy-Smith 2006; Sennett 2012) identify dialogue as experimental, spatial and symbolic in nature. Our observations of child–designer interactions captured a multifaceted and multimodal process of dialogue including verbal, bodily and also silent expression. Verbal communication was prevalent in a range of interactions and exchanges, for example, when architects explained the goal of the design to the children and, where relevant, the building project; or when giving instructions about how to use tools. Interesting was an awareness among various designers that talk can be meaningful to the children if

complemented with qualities that enhance their imagination and capture their personal interests. For this architect, for example, verbal communication involved ‘acting’; what he described as ‘speaking a little bit louder, in a fantastic way, with big gestures, like a storyteller’. Being mindful that children might lack both relevant specialized knowledge and adult experience, he saw narratives and stories as a means to transport them into a world of shared understanding, which could help them feel ‘secure’ and ‘interested’. In his view, this position of security and interest would enable the children ‘to put into words the pictures they think about’ and communicate them back to the designer, thus allowing dialogue to occur.

The designer’s reflection below offers an illustration of effective verbal and embodied instruction, acknowledging the skilful way in which an adult facilitator/builder in his team talked with children:

He gave them quite a detailed bit of instruction I suppose, but he showed them some tips and said this is how I’d do it, quite carefully and very clearly [...] not in a hurry, so it was more than five minutes although it was quite a simple task, he sat there and [...] they listened well, he’s very good at explaining that sort of thing, and then he let them all have a go quite simply, and then literally ten minutes later he was satisfied that they could do that and he then left them doing it and he didn’t go back to them.

Though instruction is by nature unlikely to be dialogic, it here serves an important role in creating the conditions for subsequent dialogue. The facilitator’s attentive approach to his exchanges with the children, also noted in our field diaries, is founded on recognition of difference and is tuned to the requirements of the young participants. Whereas the architect above describes himself adopting a ‘language’ familiar to children – storytelling – as a means to increase children’s sense of competence, in this case the facilitator carefully initiates the children into his own particular ‘language’ of making, in order that they might build their own competence. In each case, a shared understanding of language, founded on a certain level of competence – which to varying degrees also remains unfamiliar – creates the conditions for subsequent dialogic communication. With a sense of respect to both children’s capacities to carry out a task and the different pace that it takes for them to understand the process, the facilitator embodies qualities that children themselves recognize as being important in designers:

*make sure you explain everything well, because unlike a few adults, children can’t always know what adults mean right away,*

as this girl advises.

However, several architects challenged an over-reliance on verbal communication as means to support children’s involvement in the design process. ‘The chat was interesting at the beginning’, a designer explained, but then went on to describe as ‘wishy-washy’ the lengthy discussions about procedures and the use of design jargon: I’m quite aware of how quickly you leave children behind when you get into [...] a load of theoretical stuff, there’s nothing really real happening yet [...].’ In exploring what types of activities and stimuli enable children to participate dialogically, we observed that hands-on making and a rich, diverse material environment engendered variety in creative expression. This richness and variety in material expression, in turn, tended to initiate more frequent, varied and rich interactions between children and architects, centred on communicating each other’s interpretations, intentions, aspirations and misunderstandings. Such utterances would then often lead to expression of the ideas that each person’s words and creative outputs inspired in the other. The physical environment – that is, the setting of design dialogue – not merely the social and verbal environment, played a key role alongside talk in children’s engagement. This is made manifest in these boys’ suggestions about ways designers might best work with children, for example, in an ‘art room, [which] has the most things you need, like glues and tape’, or an open space in the wood, where, ‘you don’t have to move out, you don’t have to move away, because you have so many things, so much space to use up’.

The creative affordances of things – particularly ‘nature-y stuff, things with wood’, a boy explained – things that are ‘a little unwieldy maybe’, as a designer described them, enabled the



children to escape the potential limitations of perceived 'correct' technique and instead explore things for themselves and contribute to the design process in their own ways. One boy, for example, liked 'tying the ropes'; another one described having enjoyed 'the building more than the design'. In this 1:1 design-build day, children from 5–12-years-old were seen to delve into challenging tasks and engage in a different kind of dialogue, this time with the space, materials and tools – what Rautio and Winston (2015) call 'things and children in play'. Children's explorations were here supported by the many possibilities offered by the resources and by a knowledge that it was 'the real thing' and not a mock-up or small-scale model that they were working on, a boy observed. This hands-on, 'intra-active' (Rautio and Winston 2015, 16) dialogue with matter appears to be conducive to an array of creative explorations and imaginative transformations, as later discussion explores, allowing children and designers to co-create both space and their identities.

The non-verbal, embodied moments of collaboration and creation that we observed in designer-child or child-to-child interactions resonate with what Mackey (2011, 291) understands as 'children *working out* those relationships in physical ways' (Mackey's own emphasis); the 'embedded' and 'embodied' ways of meaning-making and expression, which show that 'children [...] are marshalling their physical, intellectual, and imaginative resources to sharpen their interpretive tools in ways that make sense in their bodies as well as their minds' (305).

### 3.3. *Experimental, free, immersive*

A number of authors highlight the creative dimension of dialogue (e.g. Bohm 1996, 6 and 23; Moss and Petrie 2002; Percy-Smith 2006; Sennett 2012), Isaacs (1999, 19), for example, succinctly describing dialogue as 'a way of taking the energy of our differences and channelling it toward something that has never been created before'. In the design processes that we explored, dialogue often appeared to forge transcendent creative associations; what could be called 'visionary dialogue', that is, one that allowed children and adults to imagine beyond what lay in front of them and beyond the norms of the customary and expected. This type of dialogue developed, for example, around the remaining wood shavings at the Wilderness Wood workshop when the architect and the children playfully shared ideas for use. To him they resembled marzipan strips, whereas to a girl they became play tools as she used a longer shaving as a skipping rope.

The participating designers commonly expressed a wish to introduce this kind of visioning in their co-creative processes with children, as part of a broader culture that welcomes experimentation and surprise. As this designer explained, 'falling back on past experiences, what someone has said, what they have maybe seen [...] this kind of thing we try to avoid'. The type of 'design talk' that she finds inspiring in her interactions with children invites free and messy thinking rather than forcing 'straight lines':

[...] especially with the older age groups, sort of around Year Five in primary school, what sometimes happens is kids sort of get trained, you know, they have to make straight lines with the ruler and you start getting a sense how they are inhibited by certain skills they are learning [...]

What brings out children's creative side, instead, she went on to say, is working without 'rulers'; 'I usually get rid of them because they just cause frustration'. Metaphorically speaking, the absence of 'rulers' reinforces what she perceived from her own experiences to be a key quality that children can bring, that is, a freshness and unpredictability that enable a more immediate engagement in design than most adults: 'It's exciting, I mean when you normally go and see adults you sort of know what to say, what the expectations are. But when you do it with children, it's always unpredictable', she explained. Or, as another designer put it:

[...] whenever I think of a playground I immediately think 'oh, it has to be safe', 'you have to have this much floor space between the edge of the platform and the edge of the safety surface' and 'you can't have traps' and, you know, 'nothing can be higher than three metres' and also budget is always at the back of my mind, whereas a kid just thinks 'oh, I'll make this massive tree that's like fifty metres high and put a little tiny platform on the top' [...]



An ability to identify creative affordances in things, design materials or space enabled this girl to envisage transformations:

[...] if you had any wood lying around, you could just try and make something fun, fun for yourself, and you can make anything out of that, all of the stuff lying around, because most people I know have a whole load of wood lying around and a whole load of twigs and a whole load of leaves, I mean they can make that into a kind of den couldn't they?

Children's moments of free thinking, we observed, were often accompanied by a playfulness that offered different perspectives from what would normally be expected – for example, when triggered by sheer curiosity, a group of boys explore the cardboard tubes intended as a building material, blow through them, use them to amplify their voices to a deafening level and mimic sword fighting. This tendency to perceive multiple affordances is related to Craft's (2000, 2001) notion of 'possibility thinking', summarized by posing the question, 'What if?' and reversing the question, 'What is this and what does it do?' to ask instead, 'What can I do with this?' (Burnard et al. 2006, 245). It is what a designer identifies as 'transcendence' in children's participation, in that children are continually adding to the process through dialogue both with designers and with matter, continually re-defining the parameters of something simply 'because it's there [...] while it's solid it's flexible and [lends itself] to change'.

It is not always without resistance and strain that adults respond to children's possibility thinking and expressions. This is, however, a dialogical condition, as Sennett (2012, 79) explains: '[...] differences are exposed; contact may stimulate self-understanding; something valuable will then have transpired through the exchange [...]'. This designer, confronted with the challenge of 'letting go', unravelled how children transport both their bodies and minds to unknown territory:

[It] is the rather sort of adult need to achieve something. I was sort of flapping around and being kind of not very together, [whereas] they ride that out quite well actually because they just sort of know how to cope [...] they glaze over when we're just rabbiting on too fast or you're in a flap [...] I felt there was a tension between me trying to kind of go, 'let's do it like this', versus just let[ing] them muck about and see[ing] what they came up with.

Children's perceived ability to be immersed in the moment is beautifully illustrated by a girl invited to offer advice to designers who want to work with children. She explained how letting go and 'not forcing things' works for her: '[...] move with the wood and concentrate on what you're doing [...] you can't really say I don't want to do that, you just do it and it works'. Though often tension-born for designers, being immersed appears in their accounts as a driving force for creativity through dialogue with children:

[...] what I like about making with children is that if you can get into that sort of nice bubbly, bubbling along energy where you're not talking, [...] doing something for a matter of minutes, you know, consecutively, and you can sort of shut other things out [...] then I think lots of that stuff you're talking about can quite easily start to emerge [...] if you want them to answer a question with a bit of inspirational child wisdom or insight you can't – I don't know how to just press a button and out it comes.

Transcendence we argue, here discussed as an outcome of dialogue in designer–child collaboration, also illustrates an alternative vision of child–adult relationships: what Francis and Lorenzo (2002, 164) call 'participation with vision' or 'participation as a communicative and visionary process', one that empowers children and adults to 'reinvent childhood and the places that support it'.

### 3.4. Exploratory, nourishing

The architects that we talked to were actively aware and supportive of what one of them described as children's need 'to get in touch with capability'. He saw children's personal growth and empowerment as important components of the creative process, a process which requires 'a bit of steering' to 'put them in a place where they feel like "I can do this"'. He went on to explain: 'if you can see

someone's got a bit of an aptitude or an interest or they're getting into something, you want to sort of allow that to happen further'. Orchestrating nourishing contexts for children to explore their aptitudes and interests, however, is also shown to support the overall creative flourishing of the design process, according to this designer, who also finds that the whole process 'grows' thanks to the reciprocal creative inputs of designers and children.

This type of approach to adult-child collaboration is what Lodge (2005, 134) understands as dialogue, that is, 'exploring experiences together'. As Lodge perceptively points out, however, adults' and children's mutual explorations extend beyond the co-investigation and co-creation of ideas and concern also the critical exploration of their participating selves, their ways of being, their experiences and relationships. Lodge (2005, 135) thus argues that

dialogue enhances adults' understanding about how young people learn, understand their learning and take more responsibility for their own learning [...] Through dialogue all members [...] learn more about learning than they could have learned on their own.

This dimension of dialogue is illustrated in a designer's subtle encouragement of a boy's efforts to make his playdough model snake and person stand up. We saw her kneel down by the table so that she has direct eye contact with the boy and say 'there's a bit of model making technology that you have to know about ... This won't stand up. What you need to do is have a skeleton beside it out of branches'. Very patiently she shows by demonstration a method for using a piece of wood and playdough to make the model stand. Through their joint exploration the boy finds some long branches and suggests that 'these can be the arms'. Learning through dialogue is also reflected in this designer's honest acknowledgement of new, though challenging, ways for him to engage with design: 'It was new for me, we did it a different way before, so you caught me absolutely sort of busking my way blindly you know.' Being open to new approaches, he thinks, is crucial to mastering an outlook on design that helps to see things differently. Engaging in dialogue with children is therefore to him an eye-opening experience and opportunity for learning; 'a child's answer is often totally something you haven't even thought of', he thinks, 'that's what I'm getting at'.

The above exemplify Lodge's (2005, 134) understanding of dialogue as requiring honesty and openness:

People listen, are tolerant and make new connections [...] There is a climate of trust where participants are allowed to experiment with ideas, think things through while talking, and are not afraid if they don't manage to express their ideas quickly or succinctly. Participants take time to explore, to push ideas, and use the group as a resource.

The children that we talked to conveyed to us such an experience through design dialogue. They felt at ease to take their time and 'imagine things' and 'think hard' before they put their ideas into drawings or models and they did not feel pressurized into giving 'correct' answers and quick solutions – as this girl aged 11 said, 'when you are not satisfied with some detail you erase it, you try again quite a few times if necessary'.

In our field notes and detailed analysis of film footage, we noted those moments in the design processes we followed, which Anderson (1999, 65) describes as 'dynamic generative kind of conversation in which there is room for all voices' (cited in Lodge 2005, 134). Through this lens, exploratory freedom was seen to be at the heart of dialogue, having a spillover effect both on the design process and the designer-child relationship.

#### 4. Conclusion

The qualities of dialogic space presented in this paper point to an understanding of togetherness as an inter-animation (Wegerif 2008, 349–350) of children's and architects' ways and cultures; a design-based version of the 'transversal politics' cited by Fielding (Cockburn and Hunter 1999, in Fielding 2001, 131). Previous paragraphs have shown how the design process can become a site for reciprocal

learning and a sense of togetherness embodied in people's interactions, relationships and shared meaning-making. This 11-year-old boy's appreciation of his collaboration with designers reflects this reciprocal opportunity: '[...] if it wasn't for you we would do no such things and we would never have discovered this world'. In the words of a designer togetherness becomes a condition for genuine collaboration – 'one has to really understand the needs and desires of the people that they are working with in order to co-create meaningfully'. We find Edmiston's (2010) understanding of 'co-authoring identities' particularly relevant in this sense: in evaluating his or her actions from the standpoint of the Other, the authoring self allows opportunities for co-creation and inter-animation (see Wegerif 2008, 349–335) of values to arise.

The collaboration between children and architects that we observed came with recognition that adults and children are sometimes similar to each other; sometimes different. Both difference and similarity, however, were seen as part of their everyday relationships and accommodated by the acknowledgement of the potential for different values and identities to co-exist. As a designer, for example, is drawing the plan of the structure on the blackboard, a 5-year-old girl playfully grabs the chalk out of his hands and sketches the outline of a child, in what momentarily distracts the orchestrated design activity. Rautio (2013, 6–7) describes such activity as 'autotelic', the Greek origin of the word meaning that it is a self-fulfilling (*auto*) practice, an end in itself (*telos*). We note a resemblance between the above impromptu drawing or previous rope/wood shaving skipping and Rautio's (2013) example of children carrying stones in their pockets, in that all of these activities are enjoyed in and of themselves and make the children feel comfortable in their surroundings. Everyday practices therefore become inseparable from more instrumental goals – in this case those of the design project. This often involved children drawing on their cultural references to introduce their own understandings and interpretations of the intended outputs to the design process. At the Chania Primary School, for example, and after a hard morning's work making cardboard shelves for their bookcase, this group of 11-year-old boys had the following conversation:

- |                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| Tasos:              | When you make something yourself you enjoy it more, rather than seeing it done by someone else. Because you know that you have worked for this. |
| Manos:              | Except for some things that you couldn't have made yourself ... such as a play station.   |
| Tasos:              | It's better than the library!   |
| Other boys present: | Hahahaha.   |
| Tasos:              | Manos, you know, this [pointing to the shelf structure, which resembles a stool] is for you, this makes a good play station stand!              |
| Other boys present: | Hahahaha.   |
| Manos:              | Yeah! This could be a stand for the PS4 play station.   |
| Tasos:              | It's for PS3, because PS4 is like that [shows the shape of the play station with his hands]   |
| Manos:              | No, it can work for PS4 if you place it like ...  |
| Tasos:              | [interrupts Manos] Guys, we're off the subject.   |

The above is a good example of how children communicate their views, ideas and feelings by drawing on their own familiar everyday contexts (Mackey 2011). This also evokes Willis's (1990, 1) belief that 'there is a vibrant symbolic life and symbolic creativity in everyday life, in everyday activity and expression – even if it is sometimes invisible, looked down on or spurned'. Dialogical relationships, however, are grounded in tolerating distinctiveness and difference, being 'respectful and acknowledging the legitimacy of those differences' (Fielding 2001, 131). Here, one of our participant architects articulates this understanding of togetherness as respect for difference and for the everyday condition of being – a way of being:

A lot of people, I think, feel like they can't do a job properly unless setting certain conditions – you know, I need to have all of this equipment, I need to have no noise and I need distractions out of the way, I can't have people talking [...] while I'm trying to do this [...] Just hang out with the kids while you [do] that job, which is always invigorating rather than just get it done in this dry way [...] I love that approach. I just think a quite useful way to look at lots of things is, 'why can't I do this with a child?'

Rather than a prescribed set of processes and procedures, participation – or being and acting together – therefore becomes a way of perceiving ourselves ‘in mutuality as persons, not as role occupants’ (Fielding 2000, 401; see also Hart et al. 2004, 59).

The architects’ experiences of design dialogue as illustrated above reportedly widened their perspective on design participation and their appreciation of children’s inputs to the design process. Engagement in dialogue was seen to allow architects to concentrate more on experiencing and exploring space together with children, away from time pressures and the liability culture within the construction industry. The spatial affordances of the design workshop and the perceived unpredictability of working with children were shown to allow the participant architects to explore and employ new communication modes in their exchanges with the children, such as embodied communication, fantasy talk and acting. Through dialogue with children these architects allowed themselves the freedom to experiment with different ideas and explore new paths in their design processes, which are key to enriching their own design thinking and practice. Elsewhere (Birch et al. 2016) we discuss further the learning and transformational potential perceived by designers in design participation with children. What we see as being perhaps the most valuable learning here is that in losing control – a necessity in dialogue – architects are likely to gain a sense of togetherness through their participation with children, understanding participation itself as a creative process.

## Notes

1. While there is not space here to explore the creativity literature, it is important to frame our understanding of creativity for the purpose of the paper as focusing on creative process and place rather than product or individual. (See Kozbelt, Beghetto, and Runco 2010 for a review of relevant literature and discussion of the ‘four Ps’ of creativity.)
2. Examples of spatial design processes that engaged designers and children (anyone 18-years-old and under) in collaboration have been documented on the research project website – see <http://designingwithchildren.net>.
3. Although not used in the context of this article, the role of Conversation Analysis is worth noting for a broader picture of this research project, in that its focus on language, including gesture, enabled insights into participants’ interactional rules, cultural resources and social knowledge in the construction of roles and identities within the design process (Edmiston 2010).
4. All names changed as agreed with participants.

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