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Author

Cooper, Clare C.

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University of California
Institute of
Urban & Regional Development
Berkeley, California 94720

CLARE C. COOPER



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Institute of Urban & Regional Development
University of California, Berkeley

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By Clare C. Cooper

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By Clare C. Cooper

Most people, talking of their happiest childhood experiences, will describe places that were wild, overgrown, mysterious, hidden from adult eyes; trees where they built houses, undergrowth where they created smugglers' passages, dumps where they could find scraps of wood and empty boxes. Rarely if ever will their treasured memories revolve around schoolyards or parks or other formal spaces provided for play.

Even systematic research attempts to get people to recall what they remember of the landscapes of their youth have come up with the same results; play was happiest and long-remembered in an unstructured, wild environment where fantasy, imagination and spontaneity were given free rein.¹ In an urban environment where every space is rapidly being planned, zoned, paved over, tidied up, designed, and ordered, it is imperative that children be reunited with that lost landscape of spontaneity.

An adventure playground is a recreational space where children are permitted and encouraged to build their own play-environment under adult supervision. The ground surface is left in its natural state. Building materials such as wood, cardboard boxes, pipes, planks, bricks, and rope are provided for the children to work with. The atmosphere is one in which children are encouraged to "do their thing" with minimum interference from adults, but with adequate supervision to ensure safety. There is no expanse of asphalt, no fixed equipment, no organized program. But there are endless opportunities to engage in creative play and adventure — to build houses, plant gardens, dig tunnels, hang rope swings from the trees.

Development of the Adventure Playground Concept

Although children have been engaging in such activities for generations in the yards of their homes, in the countryside, or in vacant lots in the city, it is only in the last two decades that particular supervised locales for this activity have begun to be provided in the city. And it is probably only in the last few decades with increasing urbanization that



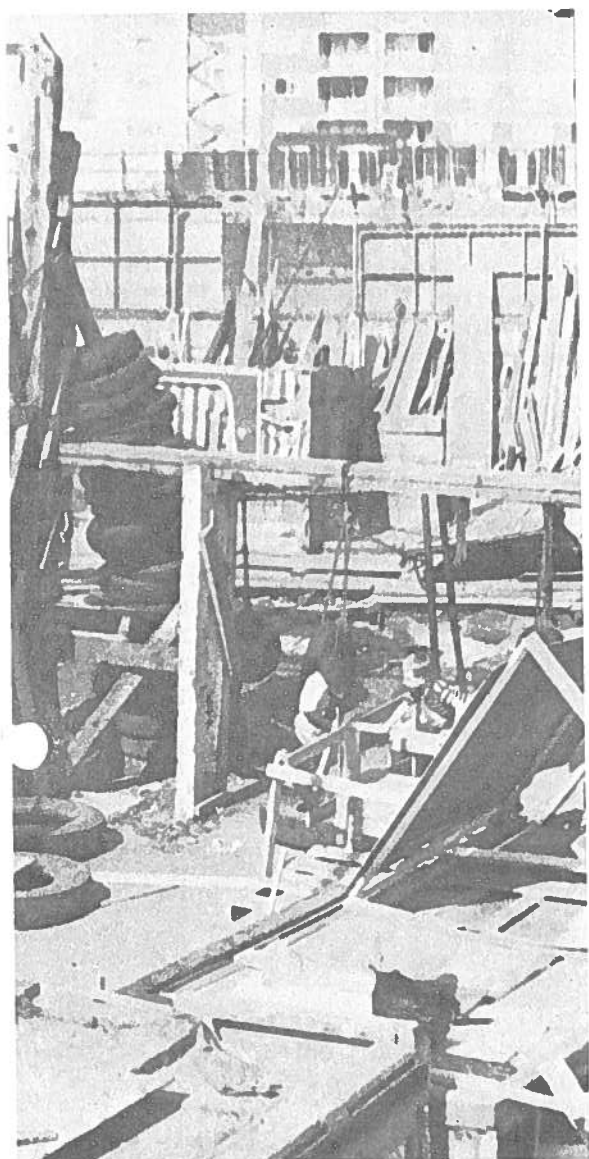
the need for such playgrounds has become particularly crucial.

In the early 1930's a Danish landscape architect, C. T. Sorenson, who had designed many conventional playgrounds, noticed that children seemed to enjoy playing with the construction materials on the playground sites after workmen had left. In fact, they seemed to gain more pleasure from this than from playing on the completed playground. This gave him the idea for a different kind of play area, and in 1931, he suggested laying out a site where children could create their own playground using surplus building materials.

As in the case of most innovative ideas, there was a delay of some years before the first such playground came into existence. That the first experiment took place in a country not only at war, but also occupied by enemy troops, is perhaps some indication of the strength of the idea and the persistence of its first proponents.

In 1943 the Workers Co-operative Housing Association in the Copenhagen suburb of Emdrup laid out the first adventure playground. It was on a grassy site, 7,000 square yards in size, and surrounded by a six-foot earthen bank. Despite early difficulties, the playground

The playground, left, may look untidy to adult eyes but to the children it's an adventure. Many such playgrounds are started by voluntary committees and later adopted by city parks departments.



Europe Leads U.S. in Reuniting its Children with "the Lost Landscape of Spontaneity"

survived and prospered and is still visited by an average 200 children daily.

The success of Emdrup prompted the opening of a similar playground in Stockholm known as "Freetown," and the first experiment in the United States. *McCall's* magazine, impressed with the Scandinavian playgrounds, decided in 1950 to sponsor a demonstration adventure playground in the United States, and selected Minneapolis — with progressive park and school systems — as the setting. The suggestion was received enthusiastically. The Board of Education lent a 1½-acre vacant lot beside Edith Cavell grade school; the P.T.A. unanimously ap-

proved the experiment; the neighbors formed a Citizen's Committee to help plan and manage the playground; members of a local teamsters union contributed time to erect a fence around the site; the City's Welfare Department lent a trailer for a tool-room and office; and a committee of educators, social workers, psychiatrists, and city administrators was formed to undertake a long-range evaluation of the experiment.

All the ingredients for a successful adventure playground were present, and indeed "The Yard," as it became known, was an enormous success. Any child between 8 and 16 could come to the play-

ground and stake out a lot measuring 10' by 16', on which to build a house, dig a tunnel, or do anything else within reasonable safety limits. To boys, the shacks were generally forts; to girls they were homes, and after construction, the business of decoration, furnishing and "visiting" began.

Because they're doing it for themselves, they figure out problems of design and construction which would probably floor them if presented in school as arithmetic. They're making most of mankind's great discoveries all over again. . . . "That's a right-angle triangle," one of the boys told Jim, pointing to his gable roof. "I invented it."

After a windstorm one day, the childrer hurried back to the playground to see how

their shacks were standing up. . . . "A neighbor of ours lost half the shingles off his garage," said Ronny Randlo, aged 11. "Look at my fort—not a board missing."²

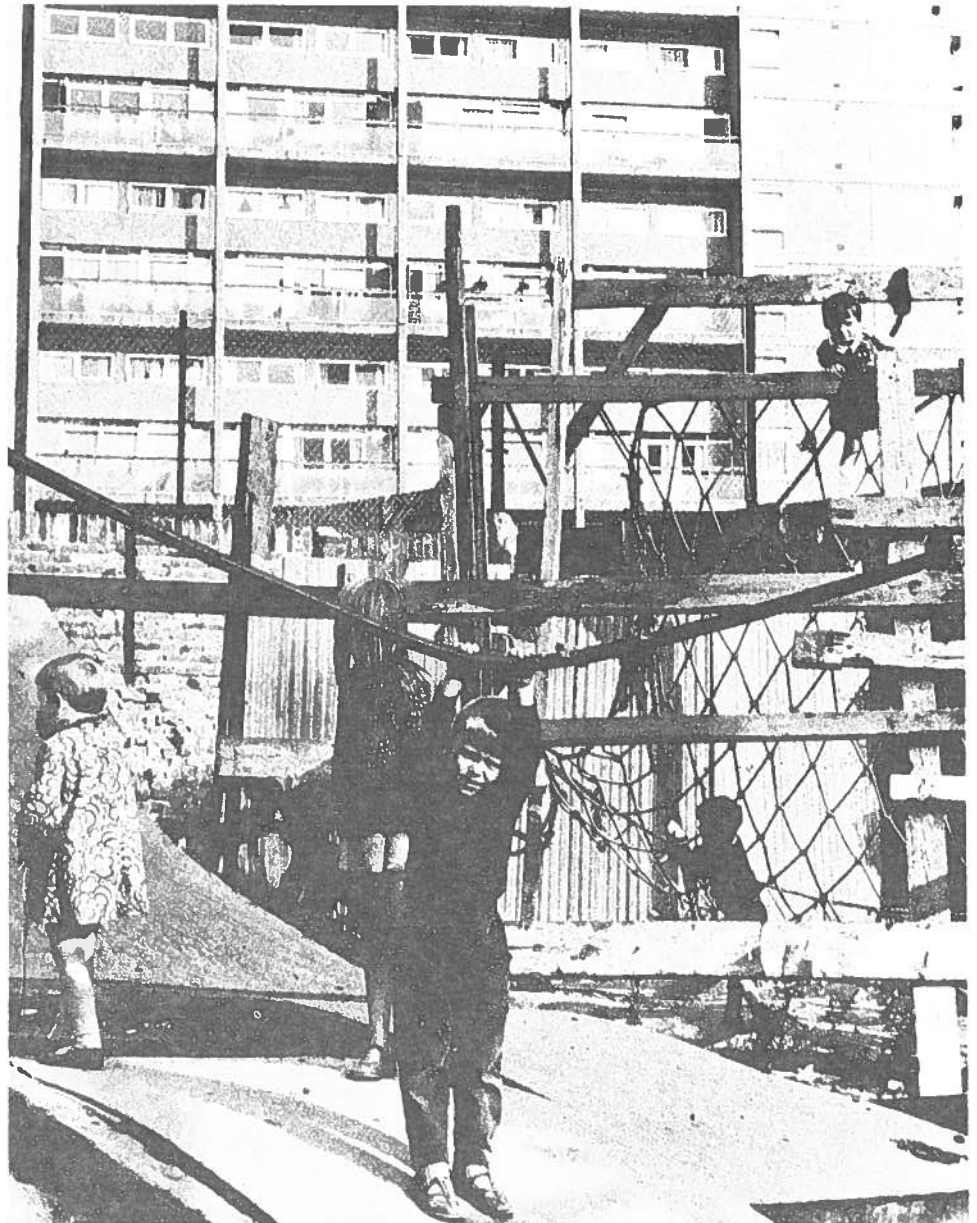
The Yard was an undoubted success, but was only a one-year experiment: despite considerable publicity, it seems not to have been copied elsewhere in the United States.

Meanwhile, in Europe, the adventure playground idea was being taken up with enthusiasm in London where numerous bombed sites offered ideal rough locations for such playgrounds. The first recorded playground was in Camberwell, London, in 1948; other playgrounds followed in Liverpool, Bristol, Grimsby, London and in some of the new towns. By 1962, the concept had become so well known and the demand for information so insistent that a London Adventure Playgrounds Association was set up to provide new playgrounds with information on sites, fencing, materials, leaders' salaries, insurance, etc.

At the present time, the Greater London Council is providing sites for adventure playgrounds in all its new public housing projects, and a school system in the North of England is providing a small such playground in each of its new grade schools.

Unfortunately, the United States, in its acceptance and adoption of this innovation, is where Denmark was in the 1940's, and England in the early 1950's. After the successful Minneapolis playground of 1950, there seems to have been little progress. A British graduate student at M.I.T. established a successful playground with an adventure component in a housing project in lower Roxbury, Massachusetts, in 1966. It was a great success and survived until very recently when the site was needed for an urban renewal project.³

A successful adventure playground was run for several weeks on a Berkeley, California schoolyard in 1967, but this was only a short-term experiment. An adventure playground established by People Pledged for Community Progress on a 100' x 60' vacant lot in Richmond, California operated for just over a year in 1969-70. This latter example indicates that city authorities and neighbors *can* be persuaded to approve innovative ideas, and insurance companies *will* provide the necessary accident insurance.⁴ The need



Top photo: the play leader takes some of the children for a ride. Right: the variety of play opportunities draws all ages from 3 to 19 to adventure playgrounds.

now is for more publicity and understanding of the idea, more practical information about past experience.

The Objective of an Adventure Playground

One can look at the objectives of the adventure playground from two viewpoints. In the more limited, negative sense, one could argue that children — being naturally inquisitive and adventurous — will inevitably seek out places where they can dig, build, destroy, light fires, and dam streams, and our best way of controlling such activity in an urban area is to provide places where it can take place under reasonably safe conditions. In a more positive sense, one could argue that the city-child, deprived of the opportunities afforded the country-child to play in woods, trees, fields and farmyards, is being deprived in a much deeper, psychological sense of the ability to learn through experimenting in these kinds of activities, and it is imperative that we provide an urban equivalent of rural play.

The urban child is cut off from all natural life, from growth of plant and tree, from water, stream, or river, from sand on the seashore. Not surprisingly when he does get into the country he thinks of birds as targets for catapults and trees as things to be hacked down for firewood. If he finds crabs in a rock pool it will not be long before he is stoning them to death. The urban child is psychologically disoriented, cut off from man's natural roots, seldom called upon to battle with the elements or to learn to co-operate with nature. This is a deep sickness which no playground movement can as yet hope to cure. But it can make a beginning. . .⁵

There is evidence to suggest that the greater the *variety* of experience of a child in its formative years, the more rapid the development of his cognitive skills. Our present arrangements for supplying areas for play provide little variety and rarely — if ever — provide the child with the experience of manipulating and experimenting with the physical environment.

It has been suggested that play is compounded of four major elements: physical development, fantasy, imitation, and adventure.⁶ The black-topped play yard with fixed equipment adequately fulfills the need for play as physical co-ordination, as do sports programs run by the schools and recreation departments. Fantasy may be indulged in anywhere — in the suburban back yard, in front of the TV, in the schoolroom, in the automobile.

But opportunities to imitate the behavior of adults, such as building "dens" and "houses," or for adventure in the form of climbing, building, tunnelling

"We think nothing of busing hundreds of children to a museum to see a piece of moon-rock, but shudder at the thought of providing them with a vacant lot and some wood to build themselves 'dens.' Who is to say which is more important?"

and fire-lighting, are practically nonexistent for the urban child.⁷ It is for this reason that the opportunities to play on an adventure playground are felt to be of particular, maybe even crucial, importance to the child growing up in the city.

We think nothing of busing hundreds of children to a museum to see a piece of moon-rock, but shudder at the thought of providing them with a vacant lot and some wood to build themselves "dens." Who is to say which is more important?

Merits of an Adventure Playground: (1) Variety of Activities

One of the chief merits of an adventure playground is the great variety of activities — and consequently of age and interest groups — it can absorb. Perhaps the following list of activity observations made on a London Adventure playground by the author on a warm, Saturday afternoon in September 1967, can illustrate better than any subjective description the extent of that variety — not only variety of things being done, but also of ages and group-sizes.⁸

The fact that all these activities can go on amicably within a very small site (c. 150' x 120') suggests that we reconsider our penchant for age-segregated play areas. These observations also illustrate a point noted in a recent study of outdoor play, notably, that a considerable proportion of children's playing time is spent in watching others.⁹

Girl (5) rolling tire, alone.

3 boys (10) bouncing on roof of "house" to break it, 2 others watching.

Boy (6), alone, filling can with water from puddle and emptying over log.

3 boys (14), playing catch with ball, up and down steps.

2 boys (16) playing ping-pong; 3 others watching.

3 boys (8) climbing rope-climbing net together.

3 boys (18), sitting and talking.

2 girls (17), sitting and talking and watching 3 boys.

2 boys (7) standing on ladder and watching bonfire.

8 boys and girls (7-9), playing softball; 2 girls (7) watching.

Girl (7) alone, swinging on rope.

2 boys (11), taking turns swinging on rope.

6 boys (15-17), taking turns on pulley-ride which runs across playground; 2 boys (5) watching.

2 boys (18) playing cards on roof of playground building; 6 others watching.

3 boys (8) sitting on roof of building watching activity.

Girl (6) on rope swing being pushed by boy (9).

Boy (11) balancing on wooden beam.

4 boys and girls (7-8), climbing onto roof of "house" and jumping off.

5 boys (16-18), sitting on steps and talking.

Girl (6) dragging old chair up slope.

Boy (16) swinging on rope; boy (6), watching him from roof of "house."

2 boys (7) collecting water in cans from tap on building and pouring down concrete slope.

Girl (5), swinging alone in rubber tire.

Boy (8) talking to 2 male leaders by bonfire.

2 girls (14), sitting on steps, smoking and talking.

4 girls and boys (6-8), sliding down slide from roof of building to playground.

2 boys (12), banging brick on roof of "house," then sawing off plank; 2 boys (9), watching.

Male leader listening at door of shed where steel-drumband is practicing.

Boy (9) pushing barrel up concrete slope, lets it roll down, leaves it and climbs wooden "tower."

4 boys (10) playing on pulley ride, waiting turns.

2 boys (8), swinging together on end of rope.

Boy (7) brushing dust from ground into fire.

Girl (6) digging alone in sand.

Boy (17) climbing to top of rope-net and down other side, watched by two other boys, same age.

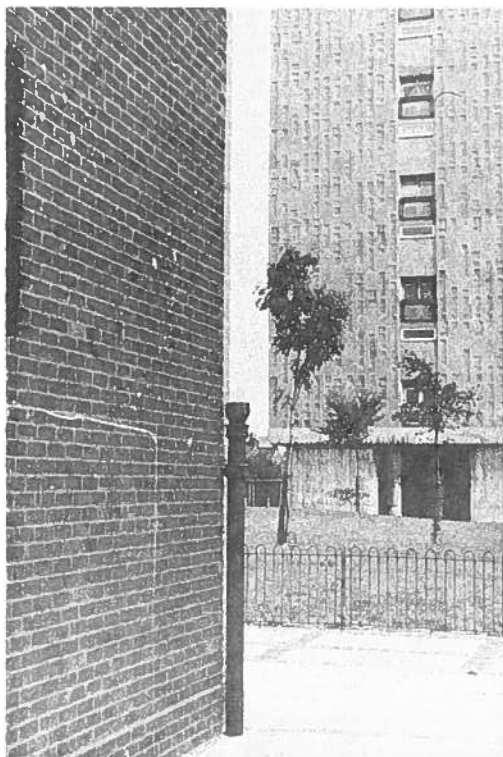
4 boys (14-16) standing at door of shed listening to band.

2 girls (12-14) standing talking to female play-leader.

Boy (16) picks old toy dog on wheels off rubbish pile, pushes along on wheels, picks up, flings into fire.

Boy (5), standing tugging at hand of male leader.

Boy (5), digging alone in sand.



- 3 boys (6) playing on slide.
- 2 boys (16) taking turns swinging on rope.
- 2 girls (13) stand leaning on rope-net, talking to male leader.
- 2 leaders stand watching boy (7) sweeping dirt into fire.
- Boy (7) swinging alone on rope.
- 2 girls (12-14) stand watching boys playing ping-pong.
- 2 boys (7-9) pulling trolley-on-track up slope and then riding down on it.
- Boy (7) sitting on log watching softball game.
- Boy (9) with shovel, flipping water from puddle into sand box.

The advantages of this variety of activities within a small space is that a child can circulate around the playground finding many different things to do that interest him; hence the tendency for children to stay much longer on this kind of playground than on a playground with fixed equipment. Variety has a further advantage; with so many things to do, there is generally something at which any one child can excel. With our societal emphasis on competitive sports, it is important to provide a locale where children who do not excel at or enjoy these activities can find a place. For this reason such playgrounds have particularly appealed to children who are loners, or who don't enjoy the "team spirit" of organized sport.

Not all activity on adventure playgrounds, however, is lone activity. Indeed, the very nature of building often requires co-operation, and children who

Sign and fenced-off grassy space tell the city children they're not wanted (left), so they play (right) where they can, seeking danger, adventure.

started as "loners" end up as "co-operators." An account of activities at The Yard in Minneapolis documents this process:

When The Yard first opened it was every child for himself. The initial stockpile of secondhand lumber disappeared like ice on a hot stove. Children helped themselves to all they could carry. . . . Some hoarded tools and supplies in secret caches. Everybody wanted to build the biggest shack in the shortest time. . . . Then came the bust. There wasn't a stick of lumber left. High-jacking raids were staged on half-finished shacks. Grumbling and bickering broke out. . . . But on the second day of the great depression most of the youngsters banded together spontaneously for a salvage drive. Tools and nails came out of hiding. . . . Rugged individualists who had insisted on building alone invited others to join in—and bring their supplies along. . . . New ideas popped up for joint projects. By the time a fresh supply of lumber arrived, a community had been born.¹⁰

Perhaps one of the most important psychological merits of this form of permissive recreation is that it provides a complete contrast with that other institution which structures most of a child's waking hours — the school.

Most urban children's school experience is that it is organized, structured, and must of necessity be largely non-permissive. But children — like most healthy human beings — require varied and opposite experiences to become truly rounded personalities. Thus the free-wheeling, anything-goes atmosphere of an

adventure playground may have significant mental health merits for the users of our increasingly crowded classrooms, as the following quotation describing a British adventure playground suggests.

The appeal that the playground had for them was the difference that it presented from the school. As one boy said: "It's the place I can come and do my mischief." What we believe he needed, if he was to grow responsibly, was the experience of being destructive and yet not losing the confidence of a stable adult—the experience which most children get in a reasonably affectionate home, and which these children lacked. Some might get it at school, but this is a chancy business in classes of over forty, where the nuisance is easier to suppress than to treat. . . . The playground was in fact complementary to the school. It was an "escape valve" where many of the children came to let off steam after school. Though many of the most difficult children on the playground were also difficult in school, there were others who were well-behaved, apparently model children in school, yet up to every kind of mischief while on the playground.¹¹

As well as contrasting with the school environment, the adventure playground provides a locale where children can engage in that essential element of play largely denied them in the city — the manipulation of the physical environment. For in moving and arranging objects in space, a child unconsciously communicates feelings about himself — a fact which of course forms the basis of most contemporary play therapy. It may be that when a child builds, rearranges, or knocks down a structure in play — whether of toy blocks in his bedroom, or empty crates on a vacant lot — he is symbolically testing his powers to change

himself. If we deny children the chance to do this, it may well be that we are depriving them of an essential learning experience on the road toward self-actualization.

The Merits of Adventure Playgrounds: (2) Numbers of Children Accommodated

Another merit of the adventure playground is that it tends to attract and absorb the interest of more children per unit of site area than a regular fitted playground. As urban land becomes more valuable, this may be a crucial element in its favor.

Counts have been made at a number of British adventure playgrounds and there is no reason to believe that attendance figures would be much different in American neighborhoods of similar densities.

A $\frac{3}{4}$ -acre adventure playground in a row-house neighborhood of a British town opened in 1955 had a total user-group of more than 400 children aged 1-16: the chief age-group was 8 to 14. The peak hour attendance figures in the summer averaged 80, and the winter figure was approximately 40.¹²

In a working-class moderate-to-high-density area of South London, a $1\frac{1}{4}$ acre playground (Lolland Adventure Playground) attracted up to 250 children at a time on peak summer days.¹³

In a middle-income, single-family and row-house neighborhood in Stevenage New Town, summer vacation counts indicate an average attendance of 95. The maximum and minimum counts of children present at any one time were 305 and 26 respectively. The playground is $\frac{1}{3}$ acre.

Those under seven came on foot from as far as $\frac{1}{2}$ mile away, and those in the 8-12 age group (the chief users) often cycled $\frac{1}{2}$ mile or farther to the playground.¹⁴

Many children by-passed a regular fitted playground that was actually closer to their homes in favor of the more interesting activities on the adventure playground.

These figures, limited though they be, do give some indication of the intensity of use of an adventure playground. They suggest that we should be less concerned about the *amount* of open space we provide for children's play than with what we put *into* that space.

If our job is to provide for people's needs, isn't the presence of 300 children on a $\frac{1}{3}$ acre site a greater indication of success than five acres of flat grassy lawn with not a soul in sight?

The Merits of Adventure Playgrounds: (3) Reduction in Vandalism

Vandalism might to be defined as an adult and/or institutional view of deliberate damage, generally though not exclusively inflicted by minors on the property of others. In New York City, the cost of school vandalism alone in 1969 amounted to \$6.5 million. The U.S. Office of Education in Washington sets the annual cost of destruction in public schools throughout the country at more than \$100 million.¹⁵ In 1967, \$100,000 was spent on repairing damage caused by vandals in buses and subways in New York City, \$650,000 on damage in public parks and repairs to vandalized phones.¹⁶

Research into the motivations for vandalism is relatively sparse, but one study suggests that schools with severe vandalism problems tend to be those where the students felt frustrated and alienated, where relationships between students, teachers and administrators were poor, and where parents had little involvement in the schools' activities. Teachers attributed boredom, disinterest in school, and peer group pressure as the chief motivations for vandalism; the students themselves rated their prime motivation as boredom.¹⁷

It has always been hoped by the proponents of adventure playgrounds that a space where children could build — and destroy — in relative freedom from adult interference, would lure off the streets some of those children who formerly turned to vandalism as an outlet for their creative/destructive urges. Although few systematic studies have been carried out on the social effects of adventure playgrounds, some evidence suggests that reduction of vandalism may be an additional "pay-off" of this form of permissive recreation.

With regard to a playground in Grimsby, England, the Chief of the Fire Department stated that:

... the area in which the playground is situated was considered a dangerous one, as the children lit fires on the streets and caused accidents. ... Since the playground has been open the Fire Department's chart for that area has been a blank.¹⁸

A similar report has come more recently (1968) from experience with a playground in a middle-income neighborhood in Stevenage New Town.

... the Police and Welfare Departments have expressed their approval of the playground. The police have indicated that the amount of vandalism in the area has been reduced since the playground opened, and the Headmaster of Bandle Hill Primary

School which is next to the playground has said that only one window has been broken after school hours and during school holidays since the playground opened, whereas, prior to the opening of the Adventure Playground, broken windows were a regular occurrence at this school. There would seem to be some justification for concluding from these facts that the playground is attracting those children who might otherwise cause vandalism.¹⁹

The only documented U.S. example reported the police as saying that since the opening of an adventure playground in a Minneapolis suburb

... we haven't had a call out that way. It used to be a headache, with kids breaking street lamps and picking up stuff from houses under construction to build their shacks along the railroad tracks.²⁰

Although the evidence is limited as yet, it would seem reasonable to assume that at least some anti-social activities are forestalled by the attraction of these unconventional playgrounds. As the frustrations of growing up in the city become more acute, it is imperative that we

"Children absorbed in playing house, or building, or digging tunnels create far less noise than does, for example, a Little League game plus vocal supporters."

think more seriously about the provision of places, such as adventure playgrounds, where the need to be energetically destructive as well as thoughtfully constructive, can be acted out without hindrance.

The Merits of an Adventure Playground: (4) Community Involvement

The initial adoption of most innovations comes about when one or a number of convinced persons persuade others of the worth of that innovation, and try it out on a small-scale, experimental basis.

It is particularly true of many social innovations that those "one or a number of convinced persons" are private citizens, and that only after some experience with the innovation on a private, volunteer-based arrangement, does the City or national bureaucracy begin to take notice. This has certainly been true so far with the adoption of the adventure playground. In every documented case, it has been a group of volunteers — usually parents of the children who will benefit — which has initially banded together to promote

the idea to their neighbors, obtain a site, raise funds to pay a leader, and persuade the requisite city authorities of the playground's worth.

For example, in the Stevenage New Town neighborhood of Bandle Hill, it was a group of mothers who persuaded the City to provide them with a site and building, stimulated interest in the innovation, raised funds, and hired a permanent play leader. The playground, now in its third year, is a great success; up to 200 children use it daily in the summer and some 500 local households contribute c. 25c a week to a lottery which gives prizes and pays the salary of the playleader.²¹

In some cases, it has been a neighborhood crisis which has precipitated the setting up of the playground. In the low-income, West Indian and Irish neighborhood of Notting Hill Gate in London, a minor race riot in the late 1950's initially brought strife and tension to the residents, and subsequently was an impetus for their drawing together in an attempt to improve community relations.

That this was a playground on which neighbors chose to work together is perhaps not altogether surprising. This was a high-density neighborhood with many families sharing dwellings, many small children, poor access to parks or playgrounds, and many dangerous streets. There was thus a need; but a playground project also supplied something else in terms of community organization. It was a fairly simple, visible, tangible facility which all with children could benefit from and about which people from very different backgrounds and political affiliations could agree.

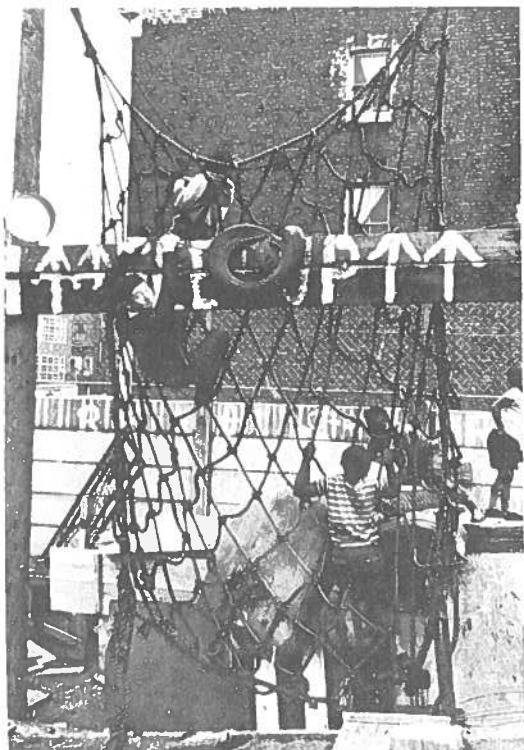
The adventure playground also has three real advantages for voluntary groups. (1) The capital costs are low (see section on Needs of an Adventure Playground); there is little need for site improvement, no equipment to be installed. A group approaching the city for financial assistance have therefore a good selling point; this is probably one of the least expensive (per-site-area) recreation improvements that one could propose. (2) It is an ideal temporary use of vacant land, and if the city authorities are somewhat dubious about its value, they may offer a temporary use-permit, and at the end of the period the playground can be removed with little capital loss. (3) The need for supervision on such a playground means that it creates jobs: with numerous federal programs for employing unemployed persons in sub-professional positions, the problem of finding financing for the playleaders need not be

an overwhelming burden to either the voluntary group itself, or to the city.²²

Because this kind of playground is — for the United States at least — a relatively new idea, it may take some persuasive selling in the neighborhood and in the city. This too may be an advantage to the voluntary group in that persuasive selling requires communication, and without communication, there can be no community.

Not only is an adventure playground project a good one to form an initial rallying point for a neighborhood: the playground itself, because of the probable need for voluntary as well as paid supervisors, and because of the necessity of fund-raising to keep it going, may well become a focus of neighborhood involvement long after its successful opening.

In a number of successful British examples, a project which started out as strictly a playground has become far more than just that. In Notting Hill Gate, London, the project was initially a temporary playground on a small vacant lot with a movable building; it was run and paid for by neighborhood volunteers. But as its success became obvious, the local parks department was persuaded to provide a larger, permanent site, money for a permanent playground building, and salaries of the leaders. Children who had played on the earlier playground were now older teenagers; facilities for them were provided within the building (TV, record player, table tennis, etc.), club meetings were held in the evenings, and a group of young Jamaicans among them built their own steel-band practice hut on the playground site. The playground which had originally been intended for 8-14 year olds began to be extended to other groups; a separate section was made for the under-5's and the Save the Children Fund provided paid child-care workers to organize a daily drop-in play group for the children of working mothers. The mothers in the neighborhood began to look on the playground as a community center and used the building one evening a week for a Young Wives Club. On other nights they and the teenagers organized a club for the many lonely, elderly people in the neighborhood. Similarly, the role of the leader has been extended; he no longer has to scout the neighborhood for waste materials, or wonder where his next pay check is coming from, but has become a significant neighborhood figure, part social worker, part probation officer, part therapist, part policeman — and a father-figure to innumerable children.



An adventure playground can thus be the nucleus of real community involvement in its planning and initiation, in its running, and in its expansion and adaptation to new demands. For this reason, it is perhaps best that it be run by a volunteer group, and not by a city department. As the playground proves itself, it may be beneficial that the salary of the leader be paid by the city; but it would be advantageous to the neighborhood it serves, if the administration of the playground remains in the hands of local parents.

The Merits of Adventure Playgrounds: (5) Recreation in Low-Income High-Density Neighborhoods

Although equally suitable as a play-environment in any part of the city, the adventure playground has particular merit as a play area in low-income, moderate-to high-density neighborhoods. As stated above, it does not require a large site — even an area formerly occupied by only one or two houses could be large enough: it is an ideal temporary use — say, of some lots awaiting redevelopment; and it creates jobs. There must be at least one full-time supervisor on the playground at all times, and depending on its size and popularity, the number may rise to five or six. Training need not be elaborate, and the work-time (fulltime in the summer, after school during the school year), makes it particularly suitable for high school or college-age students.

These are some pragmatic advantages of the adventure playground in a low-in-



Notting Hill Gate playground London, left, is a place to climb where there are no trees. Boy, right, like many, has built a place to hide.

come neighborhood. But it also has social and psychological merits. Where families live at such a density that few have access to private yards, the opportunity to build, dig, plant seeds, light fires, and take care of pets on an adventure playground offers poorer children some of the learning-experiences which middle-class children may enjoy in their own yards, or on family outings to the country. In addition, many low-income black families are female-headed; a trip to the playground can offer the children of such families the needed contact with father-surrogates in the form of playground leaders most of whom tend to be men. In a conversation in the summer of 1969 between the author and a leader of a London adventure playground drawing largely on children from housing projects, the young male leader remarked sheepishly, "I hate to think how many children call me Daddy."

In one British case, where the playground served mostly large, low-income families, a study of some of the regular users revealed:

... although relationships with the mother appear generally to be good, among over half the children, those with the father were poor, or the father was absent from the family. This reflection certainly adds weight to our general assumption that it was a substitute father that the children sought most of all—albeit unconsciously—from the playground.²³

This feature — the presence of adults, particularly men, who can be observed working at playground maintenance, assisting in building projects and so on — has special merit for all urban children, not just those in low-income neighborhoods. Increasingly in urban residential areas, not only do children never see their own fathers at work, but rarely do they have the opportunity of seeing *any* men working. The fascination for children of men fixing the phone lines or digging a hole in a suburban street is a simple example of the need that children have to observe adults at work.

Low-income and particularly ghetto residents, however, may react negatively to the idea of an adventure playground for a number of reasons.²⁴ The playground often looks chaotic and untidy and to some ghetto-residents this is too much a reflection of the environment they see all around them. They prefer their children's playgrounds to be instead neat, ordered, tidy and safe. This is not a universal reaction of ghetto residents; among the few adventure playgrounds that have been established in this country, one was in Lower Roxbury, Mass., and another in West Richmond, Calif., both in low-income black neighborhoods.

A reaction of one ghetto community group in West Oakland, Calif., was that the rich, white children in Piedmont (a wealthy community nearby) were the ones who were deprived since poor children are likely to find vacant lots and empty buildings in which to have "adventurous play" even if an official adventure playground is not provided,

whereas rich children are stuck with an ordered environment of manicured lawns and trimmed privet hedges. This reaction bears thinking about.

Some Objections to Adventure Playgrounds

The chief objections which people are apt to raise to adventure playgrounds are that they are untidy, noisy, and unsafe.

That they are untidy can hardly be denied. Untidy is in the eyes of adults; tidiness is a learned value which most children do not share. Part of the philosophy of such a playground is that it *should* be untidy, flexible, changeable, free-wheeling. Describing the early objectives of these playgrounds, an experienced leader has written:

... it was to be the workshop of the child. It was to be a place in which he would have the tools and materials to hand; where he could build, destroy and build again; where he could invent and try out, but, perhaps above all, it was to be a place which, without conscience, could be left untidy—like the workshop of the adult world.²⁵

Untidiness need not go to excess; most adventure playgrounds have a clean-up time once a week when wood and other materials no longer usable are collected and burned — the resultant bonfire forming another treat often denied the urban child.

The fear of noisiness is rarely borne out in reality. Children absorbed in playing house, or building, or digging tunnels create far less noise than does, for example, a Little League game plus vocal supporters. The kind of solid fence created to screen the playground's untidiness will also generally provide adequate noise-screening.

Another objection is that the playground is potentially dangerous. It is partly this "potential danger" that attracts children; in perceiving the possible hazards, they, like all self-preserved species, are, extra cautious in their behavior. True, the site is often rough, structures built by children may be hazardous, tools could be used in a dangerous way — but all available evidence indicates that the children are so absorbed in what they are doing, and so cautious in attempting anything beyond their present capacities, that the accident rate is in fact *lower* than that on conventional playgrounds with fixed equipment.

... in all the 10 years' experience [with adventure playgrounds] in the United Kingdom there has been nothing more serious than cuts and bruises, and no parent has ever made a claim. Children are prone to danger whatever they are doing; many fatal accidents occur when they play in the

streets amid the traffic, and very serious accidents occur when, because of boredom, they play monkey tricks on the fixed equipment on orthodox playgrounds.²⁶

The truth seems to be, that when not offered challenges, children will seemingly use "safe" equipment in a potentially dangerous way to make their own challenges.

Similarly in the Minneapolis playground:

... the safety record astonished everybody. After a year of operation, injuries consist of some banged thumbs, small cuts and bruises for the entire involvement of over 200 children. No child has ever used a tool to hit another person.²⁷

On a Liverpool adventure playground incorporating a hard-surface section with regular equipment, it was reported:

Statistically the slide appeared to be the highest risk while the permanent ironwork equipment generally produced more accidents than the junk and scrap materials in the Adventure Playground proper.²⁸

The London Adventure Playgrounds Association — an organization set up in 1962 to publicize and advise on the concept — advises new playgrounds to take out the following forms of insurance: public liability (Third Party Risk); employers' liability; burglary, house-breaking, and fire insurance. Recent experience in opening such a playground in Richmond, Calif., has indicated that U.S. insurance companies *are* willing to insure such playgrounds.

The American legal profession has instilled into public officials and citizens such a fear of being sued that this is the first objection brought up when discussing the concept. But if we can withdraw from our official roles as "Parks Director" or "school principal" and look at the community-wide costs and benefits of this form of recreation, we can perhaps get this "suing complex" into perspective, and ask ourselves some pertinent questions. Which is better for the community — a playground where children can experience challenge and excitement under reasonable supervision, or the courting of these necessary ingredients of life in busy streets and empty buildings? Which costs the community more — an occasional law suit for injury on a playground or loss of life or limb on neighborhood streets? Which financial "burden" would the community rather bear — the salary of a playleader on an adventure playground or the costs of repairing damage to institutional buildings by juvenile vandals who have nothing more interesting to do? Unless we learn to provide for children's natural appetites for excitement, adventure, and danger, we will

face the anti-social results of the thwarting of these appetites.

We accept, and even applaud, the expansion of such exhilarating, challenging and danger-courting adult sports as sky-diving, sailing, surfing, skiing and drag racing, and yet are surprised and hurt when our children desert the costly designed playgrounds provided for their leisure, and seek enjoyment on waste land, abandoned quarries, parking lots, and half-built freeways.

We should learn from this behavior, instead of merely trying to thwart it. Children, like all human beings, tell the truth with their actions. Those of us in the business of improving the physical environment should learn to interpret what they are telling us; we must learn to observe and really "see," to listen and really "hear."

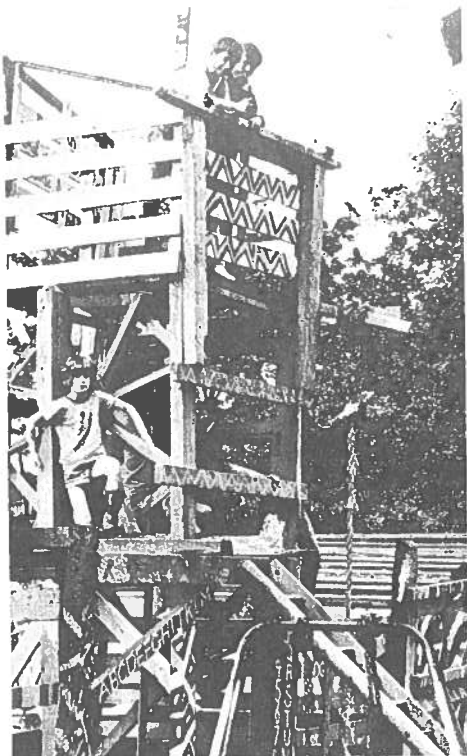
Another form of danger which adults fear on such a playground is that of children fighting and injuring each other.

"It is ironic that in the United States, where the situation with regard to the training and supply of playleaders is very much better than in any West European country, the actual record as regards the introduction of innovative play ideas is relatively poor."

Ironically, their justifications for such fears often stem from observations of children playing on asphalt playyards where pushing, shoving, teasing and fighting are frequently engaged in out of boredom. Children at a Berkeley, Calif., grade school, asked what they did in recess periods and why, replied that they mostly "pushed the other kids around" because there was nothing else to do.²⁹ Their playyard comprises a vast expanse of asphalt, and one small set of balancing bars.

In the most detailed study ever undertaken of children's games in a contemporary urban society, the authors remarked:

We have noticed that when children are herded together in the playground ... their play is markedly more aggressive than when they are in the street or in the wild places. ... Often, when we have asked children what games they played in the playground we have been told 'we just go around aggravating people.'³⁰



In a flat, featureless, hardtop playground in which there are no physical objects that can become the focus of play — to climb on, hide behind, run around, crawl through and so on — it may be that children unconsciously turn their fellows into “physical objects” and interact with them accordingly. Suffice it to say that on an adventure playground, with its multiplicity of objects, surfaces, tools, and therefore, of potential activities, fighting and bullying rarely, if ever, occur. There is too much else to do.

The Needs of an Adventure Playground³¹

Although the children will eventually build their own play environment certain basic features must be provided by the local voluntary committee or city department responsible for setting up the playground. These include the following:

1. The Site

It is essential that much of the site be left unimproved so that the children who come to use it find a completely unstructured space free from implicit messages to “do this here — do that there.”

But this does not mean that there is no designing to be done. The site must be chosen and demarked, the fencing selected, a playground building designed and located on the site, spaces for different kinds of adventure play delimited and enclosed. Especially if the site is small, this latter endeavour must be approached with great subtlety and care. In a particularly successful case — that

Lookout tower arose in Bandley Hill adventure playground, left. Stevenage Apartment children rarely may keep animals; they can, right, at St. John's Wood Terrace, London.

of Notting Hill Gate playground in London (see site plan) — a very small site is carefully divided into six areas of play: a large dirt-surfaced adventure play section, a smaller hard-surfaced play area, an area for gardening and children's pets, a section for the under-5, an area for indoor play inside the playground building, and a hanging-out place for teen-agers on the roof of the building. Low picket fencing, a concrete berm, and the building itself form the boundaries between these areas.³² Thus there is plenty of work for the designer even though most of the playground “equipment” is designed and built by the children.

The site should preferably be somewhere between $\frac{1}{4}$ acre and $1\frac{1}{2}$ acres in size. Anything smaller than $\frac{1}{4}$ acre can soon be too overcrowded; anything larger than $1\frac{1}{2}$ acres can be difficult to supervise and often lacks the intensity of use which children seem to enjoy. The shape of the site is of little importance, though perhaps a square or rectangular site would be easier to supervise than an irregular shape. The site should not be completely flat, since the change in level offers opportunities for digging, etc. If the site contains a number of mature trees — for climbing, tree houses, aerial ropeways, etc., the trees suffer no damage and add shade and beauty to the site.

The site surface should ideally be part hard-surfaced, for use of wheeled toys, playing balls, etc., and partially dirt-surfaced for digging, making gardens, hammering in corner posts of “houses,” and so on.

The site should ideally be located in the center of the area it is intended to serve and should be easily and safely accessible to children on foot, not on a busy road so that children congregating outside before opening time would be in danger. There should be access — separate from the children's pedestrian access — for trucks delivering lumber and other materials. The site should not be located so that the noise or unsightliness will disturb neighboring homes, but it should not be tucked away so that children have difficulty finding it or potential nighttime vandals have the opportunity to work undisturbed.

2. Fencing

The site should ideally be fenced with some form of high, solid fencing material so that the children inside gain a sense of privacy and enclosure, and so that passing adults are “spared” the untidy, sometimes chaotic, appearance which such playgrounds inevitably take on. A small section of chain-link or other fencing that can be seen through might be inset near the entrance so that curious newcomers can peep in before they commit themselves to entering, and so that police can check on the site after closing hours.

The most successful vandal-proof fencing has been found to be 8' of concrete planks topped with 4' of chain link.

Wooden board fencing looks better but lasts a shorter time. Perhaps the ideal arrangement is either a high earthen bank topped with a fence and planting (as at the original Emdrup playground) or a concrete plank fence screened with planting on the outside. On the inside, the concrete fencing can be used for bouncing balls against, chalking, painting, or building a lean-to structure, as well as providing the privacy that children need.

3. Playground Building

Some form of building, however primitive, is essential in which the children can play in bad weather, and where the supervisor can have a small office and the children access to toilets. The building need not be elaborate; if the site is temporary, the demountable accommodations used on building sites may be a good solution.

Where the playground is intended as a permanent facility, the building should be a permanent structure and should ideally contain the following: large indoor playroom for games, meetings, dances, table tennis, pool, etc.; activities room with work tops for painting, clay-modeling, and crafts; toilets and storage space for children's outdoor clothes; small kitchen and office for the play-leaders with a view over the entire playground; and storage for tools used on the playground. The building should be sited near the entrance so that it can be used at night without children having to reach it via unlighted stretches of the playground.

4. Materials and Tools

The two most crucial elements leading to the success (or otherwise) of the playground are the personality of the leader, and a continuous supply of tools and materials. Tools for the children to work with — including hammers, mallets, nails, saws, buckets, shovels, wheelbarrows, trowels, etc., — are supplied by the city department or voluntary committee running the playground and if an imaginative method for insuring their safe return is devised, there need be little loss through "attrition." One London playground uses the method of requiring the child to give up something of his own to the leader — pocket knife, shirt, book, etc., — which he gets back when he safely returns the borrowed tool. It is essential that the playground leader make good arrangements with local building material firms, or construction companies, or local factories for a steady supply of their "waste"

materials which the children can use in building (packing cases, pieces of lumber, sand, brick, rope, cardboard boxes). Other kinds of materials for children playing inside would be old clothes for dressing up; supplies for painting, modeling, woodworking and art work.

5. The Leader

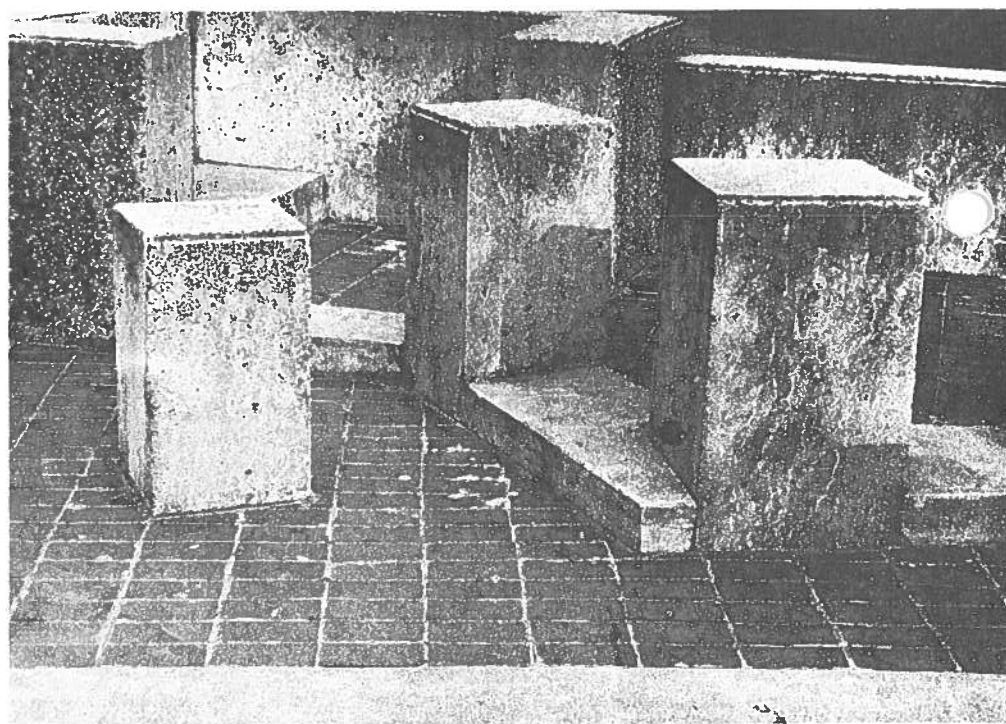
The site, fencing, building, and materials thus form the raw materials of the playground, but to come to life it must have two more ingredients — a sympathetic and talented leader, and a steady "supply" of children. These two are inextricably bound up, for it has been found in years of experience in England and Scandinavia that the success of the playground — and by success we mean numbers of children using it with obvious enthusiasm and relish — depends very largely on the personality of the leader.

In some of the most successful cases, the playground has become inextricably associated in the minds of the children

human, personal way how the leader may become slowly and unobtrusively a positive force in the neighborhood, and subtly influence the behavior of those around him.

About 6:45 Harry S. brought over a pastry which his mother had just made and sent over for me. It is perhaps a return gift, acknowledgement of the fact that I give Chris (then aged 3½) a bun when I get my tea. Chris, when I first knew him, was an ill-clad neglected-looking child who was always out in the streets. Impossible to approach, instantly on the defensive, and very aggressive. After a long period I established a friendship. He now waits for me to come—even on Sundays—he has become quite friendly and allows other adults to approach him. Lately he has been much better clad and receives more attention at home. Have been told by other children that he used to receive regular beatings at home.³⁴

There is no easy definition of the "right" person for the job of playleader; he — or she — has to combine the loving attention of a parent, the technical abilities of an apprentice-carpenter, the patience of a good teacher, and much



with its leader, as in the following case of a playground in Bristol, England:

Children do not see the playground through adult eyes. For them its meaning comes from the dens they build, the games they play, the friends they meet, and above all else from the warmth and understanding of the leader. The Upfield Playground became known in the neighborhood as "Donald's," and it was of "Donald" or "Shorty," as some of the children nicknamed him that they spoke first whenever the playground was mentioned.³⁵

A quote from Donald's logbook of playground activities illustrates in a very

more. As one authority has described the ideal leader, he must be a combination of "... mother and father, a policeman, and Robin Hood. He must be fond of children in a deep but unsentimental way. His greatest asset must be a capacity for just being there."³⁵ A British expert on adventure playgrounds has written of the ideal leader:

The successful leader of an adventure playground is one who has confidence in the children's positive attitudes to make and create things in their own individual way, and in their ability to make good relations

Continued on page 88

ADVENTURING WITH CLARE COOPER

(Continued from page 29)

ships with each other. He is less concerned with their physical development, or with organizing them into "teams" for games or joint activities, or showing them "how to play." He does, however, act as referee when a situation is in danger of getting out of hand, or when the children are unable to resolve their transient difficulties by themselves. . . . Above all, he will be eager to praise any endeavor that has patently brought pleasure to a group of children, or indeed, to an individual child, and not show his despair when the whole thing is abandoned and never completed.³⁶

Or as another British writer on play-leadership has written:

The children are sovereign and the initiative must come from them. The leader can make suggestions, but he must never demand. He must obtain the tools and materials needed or requested by the children, but he must at any moment be prepared to give way to new activities. To organize and arrange programmes is to stifle imagination and initiative and preclude children whose lively curiosity and interests constantly demand new outlets.³⁷

On an adventure playground — unlike a regular playground with organized sports events — the leader has other community-wide responsibilities. It will be his job to canvass the community to locate contractors, lumber merchants and others, and not only convince them of the worth of this innovative play scheme, but also persuade them to make regular deliveries of materials to the site. His will be the ticklish position of possibly being paid by a local city department, having his work activities overseen by a voluntary committee of parents, and yet not permitting either to dictate to him what *they* feel should happen on the playground.³⁸ It will be his job to placate neighboring householders who may object to occasional excesses of noise, or smoke from bonfires, and to liaise with police to ensure that there is no after-hours vandalism on the playground. On a number of British playgrounds, in addition to all the above duties, the leader has regular contacts with the schools, welfare, children's, and probation departments to mutually refer to each other cases of neighborhood children who are in need.

In view of the above remarks, it is perhaps superfluous to say that no existing recreation leadership training in the United States, or elsewhere, supplies all the facets of training that a good adventure playground leader would require. And it is perhaps not surprising that in documented British examples, the most successful leaders have emerged from

very varied non-recreation backgrounds — ex-seamen, ex-teachers, ex-janitors, ex-actors. There is evidence to suggest that only especially gifted individuals have in equal measure the ability to relate to children and to the community, and that where possible, two leaders (preferably a man and a woman) who have complementary talents, should be appointed.

It is ironic that in the United States, where the training and supply of play-leaders is very much better than in any West European country, the actual record of introduction of innovative play ideas is relatively poor. Undoubtedly the potential for the selection and training of excellent adventure playground leaders exists; what is necessary is more understanding and acceptance of the concept of this kind of recreation.

The Future of the Adventure Playground Concept in the United States

It is very clear that as adults in the business of designing the environments in which our children live and play, we have made a set of distinct and rigid value-judgments about what play "should" be about. We have only to look around us in any city at the stereotyped and unimaginative settings specifically set aside for play to read the message — "play is to be structured, limited to a range of physical activities predetermined by adults, and its chief purpose is to keep you healthy."

The core of public recreation — and therefore of the settings provided for public play — is physical coordination and team sports. If you raise the question with park and recreation planners of the needs of children to explore, build, destroy, engage in make-believe and fantasy, you are regarded as — at best — some kind of "kook," and — at worst — quasi-subversive.

Despite America's tradition for local involvement and grass-roots democracy, it seems that citizen-groups pressing the bureaucrats to try out innovations in recreation are far more prevalent and successful in Europe than here. The reason for this may well be the strong Protestant ethic in the U.S. which relegates play, leisure, and recreation — even for children — to a considerably lower position in both personal and municipal hierarchies of values than is true in the Old World. It is small wonder that few citizens groups are concerned with play — and the professional recreation "suppliers" coast along on well-worn solutions.



But there seems to be another reason why the adventure playground, per se, is initially looked upon by recreation professionals with an amazement bordering upon horror. It is that somehow it is perceived as appealing to a "lower level" of emotions than traditional forms of public recreation. Although the "child within" in almost every recreation planner responds to the view of children digging, building, tunneling, lighting fires, and smashing up their own constructions — with joy and excitement, the "adult without" warns that such activities appeal to "primitive" instincts which somehow cannot be as "good" as those character-building instincts for team cooperation and public acclaim fostered by organized competitive sport. It is largely this "cognitive dissonance" between instinctual acceptance of an idea, and professional rejection, which accounts for the almost anguished reactions of professional recreation directors to the notion of the adventure playground. Some of these reactions are discussed below.

To bring about the general acceptance of an innovation, its first adopters must do a good selling job in convincing their colleagues of its worth and merits. To do something for promoting and selling the idea in the San Francisco Bay area, the author made a short movie of a successful London Adventure Playground in the summer of 1967, and has shown it



High-rise apartments in background of children-built huts in Copenhagen. The huts' rooflines follow rural traditions.

since to many neighborhood and professional groups, students, parent-teacher associations, etc. What follows is a brief account of how two groups — who were afterwards asked to answer a number of questions — responded to the ideas in the movie. These were a group of 58 Park and Recreation Directors from California cities and counties who met for their annual Institute at Asilomar in November 1969; and a group of 17 landscape architecture students who were just completing a course taught by the author at the University of California, Berkeley, in December 1969.

When asked, "What is your 'gut level' response to the idea of an adventure playground? How does it appeal to you as a human being — forgetting for a moment your role as a professional in the recreation/landscape field?" more than half (57%) of the parks and recreation directors responded enthusiastically. Just over a quarter approved of the idea with some limitations, and 15% strongly disapproved. As might be expected, the students responded even more enthusiastically, with 94% strongly approving of the concept and only 1% of the group disapproving.

When the recreation and parks directors were then asked how they responded as *professionals*, the proportion who thought it unworkable rose from 15% to 47%. The chief objections were that the community wouldn't support the idea, and that insurance companies would not insure it. A few responded that they personally would strongly resist such a playground in their community:

My community would reject it totally. They would see an adventure playground as a breeding ground for vandalism, criminality, narcotics use, etc.

As a professional, I would strongly resist this kind of project on public property in my city.

It would be political suicide. People are geared to nice clean manicured play areas with shiny brightly painted equipment, even though they are not used.

Nevertheless, just over half the recreation directors thought such a playground, or an adaptation of it, would be worth trying; though some admitted the "selling job" might be difficult.

Another question asked of the parks directors was — "Supposing a person were to present the idea of an adventure playground to your city council, what do you think their chief objections would be?" The objections most frequently mentioned (in order of numbers of mentions) were — public liability and insurance (58%); unsightly appearance (49%); public wouldn't accept, would

fear loss of property values near playground (19%); too radical a notion, not what is usually provided (12%); cost (7%). Other, less frequently mentioned, objections were — fire hazards, problems of sex crimes and drug trafficking, vandalism, the disorganized nature of leadership on playground, and children's structures which wouldn't conform to building codes!

The next question was: "Can you think of any ways in which these objections might be overcome?" Some 18% of the respondents thought there would be no way to convince them, but others suggested a variety of ways. One-third thought the best way would be by good presentation, showing the films to the council or parks commission, taking them to see successful examples, producing statistics on accident rates, etc. Another one-third felt the best way was to modify the idea, to propose it as a temporary pilot program, and to find a site well out of sight. A few thought the support of other city departments and/or the academic community would be useful. About one-fifth felt the best way was not to try and convince the *council*, but to educate and convince the community and then have them pressure the council to provide such a playground, or to get a private group to sponsor and run such a playground and show the council that it worked. A few thought the best way was not to ask the council at all, but just to go ahead and do it, or as a last resort — "get rid of the council."

In a final question, respondents were asked if in fact there was a possibility they *would* propose or support a proposal for a playground incorporating some of the ideas of the adventure playground in their community. At the start of the questions, when asked their reaction as a professional, only 52% thought the idea was "worth trying," but in answer to this latter question, as many as 79% said they might propose such a playground in their community. The explanation of this increase in supporters may be that, when asked the question, few would want to rule out the possibility that they might try it some time in the future; but another explanation may be that the very exercise of responding to questions concerning the advantages and disadvantages of such a playground as well as means of overcoming the objections, had the effect of people convincing themselves that the notion was worth try.

This is an important pointer to the whole problem of selling innovations —

get people talking, arguing with each other about the problems and merits, and in the process, they may begin to convince each other — and themselves — of its worth. One participant wrote after the movie and discussion, "My first reaction to the concept was very definitely negative . . . but eventually a feeling of acceptance and excitement overcame the negative attitude and the concept became a challenge."

Writing from the heart about the problems of innovation-acceptance, one participant observed:

The key to the speaker's presentation was the acceptance of change, not only in the areas of playgrounds but in our interaction with people and communities.

Audience reaction to the presentation was of interest to me. I sensed group acceptance of what the speaker (and film) were saying, and yet there was a comic atmosphere. This combination is significant to me in that we tend to joke about significant things. It becomes easier to be light-hearted about many critical problems, with the idea in mind that with time they will disappear. I think that the group, myself included, experienced great frustration in listening to the speaker—not because of what she was saying, but because we are often unable to implement innovative ideas. . . . Issues that create controversy or draw criticism are often tucked away for further study. We may wish to practice what we hear but we do not. What do we gain by procrastination? The administration who is insensitive to change as a matter of self-preserva-

tion may ultimately be toppled by prevailing outside forces. . . . Without listening, learning to change, we risk far greater future losses than are presently imaginable.

Another participant echoed the feelings of many when he noted:

We seem to worry about "backlash" and not of the children who are the users of our product.

And the following theme was one expressed by many:

Our playgrounds must serve and meet the needs of our children—and not preconceived adult concepts. . . . Now is the time to make our voices heard . . . by upholding children's rights. . . .

Some wrote of a more hopeful, changing climate in local government that is more open to innovation than in the past.

Up until three years ago, the policies of our city's administration towards recreation was one of . . . "circle the wagons and we will make a stand here." Little thought was given to planning a park that would meet the needs of the people. We had set guidelines and standards that would have been outdated in the 1930s. . . . We had X number of swings, X number of trash cans, and X number of rest rooms—and all of these were placed in the same general area in each park. . . . Needless to say we had parks that are seldom if ever used to capacity. No one ever thought of asking the people in the neighborhood what they wanted. . . . I'm not sure we built the parks for use by the public.

Our city's administration has now changed

. . . we have been given a challenge and we are striving to meet it. . . . We are trying to plan for the children and their needs and not just put in a bunch of pretty new equipment. . . . We have gone into the neighborhood and talked to the kids. We have observed them at play . . . in the streets, supermarket parking lots, vacant lots, and front yards. . . . We will be doing a lot of experimenting. . . . We have been given the tools, the ideas, and the money; now it is up to us to produce.

It should be stressed that the whole purpose of presenting innovative ideas to a professional group is not necessarily to persuade them to adopt them — lock, stock and barrel — but rather to stimulate them into thinking in new ways. The final quotation is from one participant who did just this, and who has come up with what may be an excellent adaptation of the adventure playground concept for the American scene:

The experience with creative play in Copenhagen proved to me that its great success was partly due to the inherited instinct of the children. Their ancestors were masters in design and woodworking, and they bring this ability to the playground with them. I can see great success with creative play in this country if we will also take a look at what our children have inherited. Practically every American child from the day he's able to sit up is involved in playing with mechanical things. We may do well to use this knowledge in attempting to get the creative play idea started here. I can see a play area designed to allow young people to build mechanical things such as

1. Kevin Lynch and Alvin Lukashok, "Some Childhood Memories of the City," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, Summer, 1956.

2. Lady Allen of Hurtwood, *Adventure Playgrounds*. London: National Playing Fields Association, 1961, p. 3.

3. For further details on this playground established by Robin Moore, see the chapter on Adventure Playgrounds in, Lady Allen of Hurtwood, *Planning for Play*, pp. 72-77; and Robin Moore, *An Experiment in Playground Design*. Unpublished M.C.P. thesis, M.I.T., 1966.

4. For more information on this playground, write Mrs. Lovie McIntosh, Director, People Pledged for Community Progress, 705 Bissell Avenue, Richmond, Calif. 94801.

5. John Barron Mays, *Adventure in Play*. Liverpool: Liverpool Council of Social Service, 1957, pp. 6-7.

6. W. D. Abernethy, "The Importance of Play," in *Children and Planning*, special issue of *Town and Country Planning*, October-November, 1968, p. 471.

7. There are various theories as to why children from all cultures engage in play which imitates the behavior of adults. Groos suggests it is a form of instinctual play in which the animal or human is training itself for roles it will have to play in maturity. Others maintain that play recapitulates the development of the entire race. Freud suggests, in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," that children repeat in their play everything that has made an impression on them in life, and that they become masters of these situations they have observed by constant repetition in play. However, it is not the purpose of this paper to answer the question "Why?" concerning children's play. We are taking the fact of imitative and adventurous play as a "given" and suggesting ways to better provide for it.

8. These observations were made by the author standing at one vantage point in the playground and noting down everything that was happening for a half-hour period; the number of children on the playground at the end of the period was 45. The ages are estimated.

9. Vere Hole, *Children's Play on Housing Estates*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1966.

10. Lady Allen of Hurtwood, *Adventure Playgrounds*. London: National Playing Fields Association, 1961, p. 13.

11. John Spencer, with the collaboration of Joy Tuxford and Norman Dennis, *Stress and Release in an Urban Estate: A Study in Action Research*. London: Tavistock Publications, 1964, Part IV, "The Upheld Adventure Playground," p. 261.

12. *Adventure Playgrounds: A progress report by the National Playing Fields Association*, London 1961, p. 18.

13. *Adventure Playgrounds: A progress report by the National Playing Fields Association*, London 1961, p. 8.

14. Stevenage Development Corporation: *Study of Playgrounds in Stevenage* (Unpublished, mimeo, 1969), p. 30.

15. "The Vandal, Society's Outsider," *Time*, January 19, 1970.

16. Philip G. Zimbardo, *The Human Choice: Individuation, Reason and Order vs. Deindividuation, Impulse and Chaos*. Nebraska Symposium on Motivation, March, 1969. Reprinted as a report from Experimental Social Psychology Laboratory, Department of Psychology, Stanford University, p. 50.

17. Nathan Goldman, "A Sociopsychological Study of School Vandalism," in *Crime and Delinquency*, July 1961.

18. *Adventure Playgrounds: A progress report by the National Playing Fields Association*, 1961, p. 18.

19. Stevenage Development Corporation, *Study of Playgrounds in Stevenage* (Unpublished, mimeo, 1969).

20. Lady Allen of Hurtwood, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

21. Information from conversation with Donne J. Buck, leader of Bantley Hill Adventure Playground, September 1969.

22. Playleaders on the Richmond, Calif., adventure playground were paid through the National Youth Corps.

23. John Spencer, with the collaboration of Joy Tuxford and Norman Dennis, *Stress and Release in an Urban Estate: A Study in Action Research*. London: Tavistock Publications, 1964, Part IV, "The Upheld Adventure Playground," p. 214.

24. The reactions which follow were those relayed to the author after showings of a short movie on a British adventure playground to low- and lower-middle income neighborhood groups in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1968-1969.

25. Joe Benjamin, *In Search of Adventure*, p. 14.

26. Lady Allen of Hurtwood, *Planning for Play*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1968, p. 62.

27. Lady Allen of Hurtwood, *Adventure Playgrounds*, London: National Playing Fields Association, 1961.

28. John Barron Mays, *op. cit.*

29. Verbal report from teachers at a PTA meeting, Le Conte School, February, 1970.

30. Iona and Peter Opie, *op. cit.*, p. 13-14.

31. This section is summarized from three sources: Lady Allen of Hurtwood, *Planning for Play*, Chapter IV, "Adventure Playgrounds"; London Adventure Playground Association fact sheets; Stevenage Development Corporation, *Study of Playgrounds in Stevenage* (mimeo, unpublished).

32. For greater detail on the site planning and build design at Notting Hill Gate playground, see Lady Allen of Hurtwood, "Planning for Play" London: Thames and Hudson, 1968, pp. 61-69.

33. John Spencer, *Stress and Release in an Urban Estate: A Study in Action Research*. London: Tavistock Publications, 1964, p. 221.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 257.

35. W. D. Abernethy, *Play Leadership*, p. 24.

36. Lady Allen of Hurtwood, *Planning for Play*, p. 56.

37. Joe Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

38. A revealing account of this problem-situation can be found in John Spencer, *Stress and Release in an Urban Estate: A Study in Action Research*, London: Tavistock Publications, 1964.

39. These are quotes from the final exam papers of participants in the Institute, where they were asked: "Select any single general topic (i.e., planning, design, decision process, etc.), or any single presentation or paper given by a speaker at the Institute, and answer in no more than 1,000 words — As a park administrator (planner, designer or —), (1) what does the essence of this topic or presentation mean to you, and (2) why is it important?"

go-carts or other motorized conveyances. An area designed as a building area with storage garages and material bins could be next to another area or track for the kids to run them on. How many kids do we see in this country working on some mechanical gadget in his yard without a place to test it?

The emphasis here on the merits of the adventure versus the regular playground does not mean there is no place for swings and slides and jungle gym with which we are all familiar. Adventure playgrounds should not be thought of as substitutes for conventional play-areas, but rather as very important supplements which hopefully round out the recreational experience of the contemporary urban child.

The extent to which "problems with children's play" turn up again and again as a major complaint in moderate and high-density urban housing developments suggests that our current provisions for play in these areas are *not* fulfilling the needs of children or of their parents.

We try to deter children from manipulating elements of the nature environment — earth, water, fire, wood, plants — but trees climbed, holes dug, houses built in the landscaped areas of housing projects, parks, and suburban subdivision bear witness to the fact that children desperately need a place they are permitted

to do these things. An important creative experience is being denied them.

In addition, the fascination for children of streets, parking areas, vacant lots, empty buildings, and other potentially dangerous locales suggests to us that another crucial element is missing from the play-areas we presently provide — the element of challenge. The adventure playground provides these ingredients of creativity and challenge, as well as much more that is missing in the conventional playground.

The verbatim responses of some Berkeley landscape architecture students after seeing the adventure playground movie express succinctly why this is something we ought to try out:

I think the idea is fantastic. It allows the children to be creative in their own way and allows them an escape.

I think it's a wonderful idea. When I was watching the movie I was wishing I could be there, too.

Fascinating and yet so human. A great way for kids of all races to get together. Reminds me of my childhood.

Wow! Frightening-creative-dangerous-warm-human. Strange and wonderful. It has a kind of eerie fascination.

I wanted to be there. I remembered my childhood and how I liked to do those things.

Wow! Far out! We need it here! Now! Change some heads! All power to the imagination!

It was perfect!! Kids building, climbing, breaking, digging. These people will have

a chance to live.

There is no time like now for experimentation. Are we going to deny our children the experiences which we most enjoyed when we were young? If we do, each of us must have it on our conscience that in this most affluent of countries, we have deprived our children of something they want and sorely need.

It is not a question of dollars or space or regulation, but of our own limitations. We tend in both our personal roles and our professional life to define ourselves by our limitations . . . "Well, that's not appropriate behavior because I'm a man . . . or . . . "We can't do that because the parks departments have never done that before." But we grow personally and professionally when we challenge those self-imposed limitations, when we recognize that anything and everything is possible. Like children at play, we too are unconsciously looking for challenges which will help us expand. We should not let the challenge of adventure playgrounds go unanswered. It could make a vital difference to a whole generation of children growing up in the city.

All photos by the author except those on pages 88 and 89 which are from Ezra Ehrenkrantz, architect, San Francisco.

NOTE: It is perhaps not without significance that 70% of the items in this bibliography are European — mostly British — in origin. This does not, I think, reflect a chauvinistic bias on the part of the (British) author, but rather is an indication of where much of the practical work and writing on outdoor play and play-designs is going on. My hunch

is that why this is so is that — in general — Western European countries move more quickly and pragmatically to fulfill the needs of minorities than does the U.S. One has only to look at the record of legislation on, for instance, free health care, subsidized housing, the repeal of capital punishment, legalization of abortion and homosexuality —

to see that the U.S. often lags one or two decades behind. Children too are a minority — in the sense of having no power over the decisions which affect their lives. The United States, despite its professed self-image of a somewhat child-oriented society, has still to recognize this.

CLARE COOPER

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- ¹Obtainable from: Housing Centre Bookshop, 13 Suffolk Street, London S.E.1., England — priced as follows (number refers to those in Bibliography). 1 — 75 cents; 2 — 60 cents; 3 — 25 cents; 5 — 25 cents; 6 — \$1.25; 17 — 40 cents; 22 — 25 cents. (All prices *not* including postage).
- ²Obtainable from: Town and Country Planning Association, 28 King Street, London W.C.2., England, price 75 cents; *not* including postage.
- ³Obtainable from: London Adventure Playground Association, 4 Lansdowne Road, London W.11, England, at nominal cost.

"My formal education," writes author CLARE COOPER, "is in geography (BA from the University of London and MA from the University of Nebraska), and in city and regional planning (MCP degree from the University of California, Berkeley). My present position is Lecturer in Environmental Behavior in the Department of Landscape Architecture at Berkeley, and researcher in the Center for Planning and Development Research.

"The antecedents of my interests in adventure playgrounds, however, go back a long way, to World War II when the Blitz prompted the evacuation of my family, like many others, from London to the relative safety of the English countryside. There my brother, myself, and our friends spent our formative years roaming the fields and woods of Buckinghamshire, raising rabbits and chickens and vegetables to supplement wartime rations, building platforms in trees, excavating underground dens, damming streams, crawling through the overgrown flower beds of a nearby Stately Home, and roasting potatoes in the hot ashes of campfires. Our greatest project was the construction of "The Hut" in a wood not far from our home. With walls of flattened-out ex-Army gasoline cans and a "thatched" roof of branches and leaves, our home-from-home had a stove with chimney and oven (made from a lavatory cistern), makeshift furniture, an outer perimeter fence of twisted branches, and a lookout platform in a yew tree where we kept watch for 'the enemy.' Years afterwards in nostalgic late-adolescence we returned—and found The Hut still intact.

"Though it is dubious to think of war as a blessing, I have it to thank for a childhood full of adventure, exploration and fantasy as I discovered the wonders of the natural world around me. Not that the fields and copses furnished all our childhood adventures: occasional visits to an 'off-limits' playground in a nearby town — with asphalt, swings, shiny metal slides, and a dizzying maypole, were as much a thrill for us as a visit to a farmyard for an urban child.

"I have no doubt that it was the great *range* of play experiences I had as a child, coupled with the freedom to roam safely on foot and by bicycle wherever I wanted to go, that has caused me to look with some concern on the restrictions we currently place on children growing up in the city. My first encounter with adventure playgrounds took place a few years ago on a return visit to London (I have lived in Berkeley, Calif. since 1962). I was taking photos in a rather dreary playground when a small, grubby child said: 'Hey, Miss! Let me show you where we *really* like to play!' And he took me round the corner to a walled vacant lot with the sign 'Adventure Playground' on the gate. It was still muddy from recent rain, but between the puddles were small shacks labelled 'Private' and 'Our Place,' and in the center a splendid look-out tower from which one could watch the busy street beyond. I was captivated! The kids tugged at my hand to 'Come see our house!' I took many pictures to show to colleagues in California, but finding later that slides could hardly convey the activity and spontaneity on such a playground, I returned a year later to make a short film.

