Exploding School: The Potential for Outdoor Learning and Play Space in North Inner City Dublin

Rosaleen Leonard
The Exploding School

Visualising interventions into the Royal Canal site which ended up being my area of interest.

Ward and Fyon’s concept of The Exploding School greatly informed my approach to the problem of a lack of outdoor space for schools and young people in the area.

The Exploding School refers to the process of embodied learning within the community and away from desk based teaching.

This idea builds on the belief that young people already understand much about their local environment and are empowered to change it. Through pedagogy based in the local environment a stronger relationship can form between the young people and their surroundings. In turn, Ward believes this process can open up discussion about who designs cities, and encourage young people to directly engage in this process through making and designing.
Children in Primary School (U12yrs) = no. of Young People (U 18yrs) in total = Public Park

1921 Children in Primary School (U12yrs)

= no. of Young People (U 18yrs)
8231 in total

= Public Park
National spatial factors:
25 pupils per classroom on average

Local spatial and socio-economic factors for schools interviewed:
- 15% of students are homeless
- High percentage living in apartments / flats
- 90% of students’ parents or students themselves born outside of Ireland, may have smaller local support networks
How might we:

- Create new shared spaces in this area for pedagogical and play opportunities?
- Build on young people’s playful nature, knowledge and interaction with the local environment
- Move away from arguments about anti-social behaviour and view play as an opportunity for community building
- Create new rituals outside of classrooms
- Augment opportunities for everyone to participate in public life in the NEIC
Initial research

Mixed methods
Quantitative and Critical Methods

Mapping of local public parks using census data

Semi structured interviews with teachers and home school liaison officers working in the NEIC. Interviews with experts in fields of design and children’s wellbeing (Suzanne and Laurence)

Co-creation workshops with young people living and going to school in the area

Moving towards ideation

Ethnographic methods
Embodied Learning

Participant observation of space - using it for travel and leisure

Co-creation workshops with young people living and going to school in the area

Final interview with design practitioner (Tara)
Activity Pack for the Royal Canal

Start at the Ballybough Lock of the Royal Canal!

Along the way, you will see symbols on the walls and pavement. Each symbol represents a different task you will have to do when you are at that spot.

Remember to use your camera to record your journey!

This sign means you have to look for something!

Wherever you see this sign, draw something on the wall or the pavement!

If you see this, you will need to make something!

Write down what you can hear when you see this sign!

Open up the flip side of this page to see what you need to find...

Royal Canal was built in the 1700’s as a transport system and links River Liffey in Dublin to the River Shannon in Longford. A total of over 100 canal boats would travel from Dublin to Mullingar, it would only take you 12 hours!

We are here!

Stinging Nettle / Nettles

Nettles are green and are used with vitamins! Throughout Irish history they were used as medicine, food, and tea.

Hairy Vetch

Valerian was a very common medicine. It was used to send people to sleep.

Creeping buttercup / Foard

Red Vesner

Hairy Willowherb

Willowherb was sometimes used for its bright flowers, it was sometimes used to treat breathing problems.
Activity Pack for the Royal Canal Treasure Trail