

Learning through landscapes

Image by LTL/Malcolm Cochrane with comment from Dr Jenny Gibson (University of Cambridge)

Playtime is an important aspect of everyday life for most school-aged children. As well as an opportunity for fun, the free-for-all of the playground is a challenging environment that provides opportunity for cognitive, social and physical development. Children engaging in successful playground peer interaction often demonstrate social, cognitive and communication skills at a more sophisticated level than those evident in other school contexts. On the other hand, those with developmental difficulties can struggle to navigate the social world of the playground.

A new collaboration between children's environmental charity Learning through Landscapes (www.ltl.org.uk), and researchers at University of Cambridge and University College London has been formed to investigate some interesting open questions. Dr Jenny Gibson (Centre for Research on Play in Education, Development and Learning (PEDaL), University of Cambridge) says: 'Are children less likely to be aggressive if they are in a more "natural" playground compared to a concrete school yard? Do different groups of children play and interact differently on the playground (e.g. are girls really more sociable than boys?). Can we reliably detect early signs of conditions like ADHD or Asperger's syndrome just from observing play? Additionally, very little is known about the interaction of individual differences with the characteristics of the playground environment and how this might influence group behaviour.'

The team are developing a novel methodology combining GPS, computer modelling and more traditional forms of observation in order to gain deeper insights into the world of the playground.

