

The Swimming Pool – A Case Study

The children and young people had decided to make extensions for the jumps on the BMX jumps that had been recently built. During this process big holes had been created on the sides of the jumps, using the excess soil to form the extensions, even though I had informed them that this process would eventually lead to the jumps becoming smaller!

In order to stop the jumps from disappearing, we had taken some buckets and spades up to the park to repair the holes digging soil from another area but the children present were unenthusiastic about the activity. Despite this I decided to dig a hole myself and do my best to repair the holes hoping that they could see the intentions, but they seemed content just to watch my efforts. However after about thirty minutes one child said:

“Yeah we can build a swimming pool”

With this he proceeded to take my spade and muster the employment of several other children who then went about with gusto to dig a much bigger hole. This went on for over half an hour, with the children working co-operatively until they decided that the pool was ready for action.

They decided to adopt the use of a tarpaulin to act as a lining which they weighted down with rocks they had dug up and then spent a frenzied time getting water in containers from various sources.



A group of ten children then preceded to play in the pool for the next hour... enjoying a range of different creative activities from paddling to making mud islands, making boats having chats in the pool or just getting soaked ... This whole process was personally directed and intrinsically motivated by the children, they had complete ownership of the play and it was developed naturally without the need for us to intervene or entertain.

During this pool construction I had a conversation with the boys who had been building the jump extensions earlier they asked me if the mud for the jumps could come from this new hole. Agreed!

After a two holiday we came back to the park and all the holes in the sides of the jumps had been repaired! One of the boys obviously proud of his work came over and explained what they had been doing and asked if he could use more soil to build higher extensions to the jumps.



For the next week a group of eight boys became a complete work unit, turning up to the sessions with wheelbarrows, spades, rakes and buckets carefully making the jumps fit into their desired specifications. Their designs were carefully thought through with consideration of other track users, by making the new jumps on one side of the ramps.



‘We don’t want to make it hard for everyone, little kids can still use it here... But they do kick all the jumps on the ramps though! ‘

During this whole process they had dealt with younger children deconstructing their creations, carefully landscaped the ‘swimming pool’, swept up the park of loose materials, and even sensitively negotiated with local residents. These boys had an inborn drive to do and learn how to do, an urge to master the environment (Hendrick 1942).

With the completed ‘new look’ jumps the boys take great pride in giving daring ‘bike stunt shows’ to new visitors to the park. One such stunt involved a child sitting upright in wheelbarrow, between the two jumps whilst another jumped over them on their bikes!

The boys (with more additions) have for the past three weeks been entirely separate to the play sessions in the park appearing to be happy, independent and confident.



Wansdyke Play Association

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