

For every child in Northern Ireland,



to play is a human right

*Harry Shier
Centre for Children's Rights, Queen's University Belfast*

...and CESESMA, San Ramón, Nicaragua



Mini biography



1954

Born and brought up in Ireland.

1973

Lived and worked in England: Adventure playgrounds, training playworkers, later promoting children's right to play and participation.

2001

Moved to Nicaragua: Supporting child coffee workers organising and participating to defend their rights.

2012

Temporary relocation back to Ireland to do research for a PhD.

IPA did a brilliant job in getting this General Comment.



Mumbai



Beirut



Nairobi



Mexico



Bangkok



Johannesburg

Now it's over to us to pick up the baton and run with it.

This presentation asks the question, "What do we need to do here in Northern Ireland?" and offers some thoughts to help us work towards answers.

What do we need to do here in Northern Ireland?

It is all too easy for government and local authority officials to scan the General Comment, tick the box that says they've seen it and then file it away for future reference.



So the challenge is to prevent this from happening. But how?

The task ahead: Turn what looks like another boring old official document into an exciting, practical tool for transformation.

A **human-rights-based approach** suggests the task divides in ~~two~~-three:

- Empowering rights-holders (children) to claim their rights;
- Support parents as advocates and defenders of children's rights.
- Enabling duty-bearers to meet their obligations.

In all three cases the work starts with awareness-raising, and then goes on to capacity building.

A photograph showing a woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a floral patterned top, smiling warmly at a young girl. The girl is also smiling and looking up at the woman. They are positioned in front of a large window with white frames, through which some greenery is visible. The overall mood is positive and affectionate.

**BECAUSE
CHILDREN
HAVE RIGHTS**

Empowering children

Awareness-raising:

- Children need to know what their rights are – in this case, their Article 31 rights – and what they can do if their own or other children's rights are not respected.

Capacity-building:

- Children can develop skills as advocates for their own and others' rights: learn to investigate and analyse the problems they face, put forward proposals, and hold duty-bearers to account.

As an example of empowerment in action, over the next six months Playboard will be supporting a team of child researchers to:

- develop a child's-eye view of what the General Comment is about;
- investigate the problems that limit the right to play in Northern Ireland;
- produce recommendations on what duty-bearers and other stakeholders need to do;
- present their findings and recommendations at a national conference in October.

Supporting parents

Awareness-raising:

- Parents need to know that their children have a right to play;
- ...and that local and national government, education and health authorities etc. have duties to ensure this right is respected, protected and fulfilled.
- Parents need to be able to assess the risks and benefits of different types of play REALISTICALLY— particularly outdoor and free play.

Capacity-building:

- Like children, parents can develop skills as advocates; for their own and their neighbours' children, and all the children of their community.
- Like children, parents can learn to investigate and analyse the problems children face in realising their right to play, and to organise at community and district level in search of solutions. Parents and children together can put forward proposals, and hold duty-bearers to account.

Enabling duty-bearers to meet their obligations

Awareness-raising:

- Officials and politicians need to know what their obligations are.
- It also helps if they understand why play is important for a healthy happy community, and the long-term benefits of promoting an active, playful population.

Capacity-building:

- Duty bearers have obligations to respect, protect and fulfil children's Article 31 rights. Enabling duty-bearers to meet these obligations needs to be tailored to the different roles they have; for example roles in:
 - town-planning
 - health services
 - education
 - housing
 - social services
 - community development
 - policing and security ..among others.

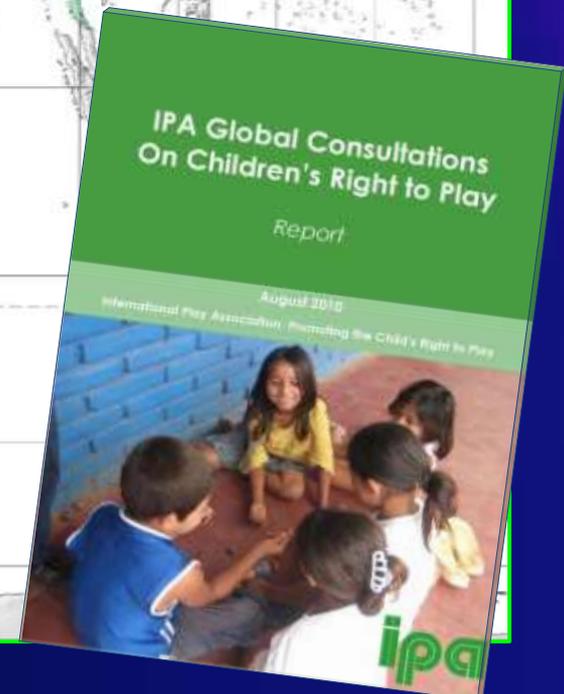
All have a duty to respect and protect the right to play, and many have specific duties to fulfil this right as well.

IPA's global consultation on children's right to play

Consultations were carried out in eight countries from January to June 2010.



...and a final report produced



The final report identified hundreds of infringements of the right to play around the world, but these could be classified under 14 headings:





1. Adults unaware of the importance of play

- Parents' attitudes restrict play opportunities, limit and control play.
- Communities hostile to children at play.
- Professionals, officials and policy-makers equally unaware of the importance of play

2. Unsafe environments

- Physical dangers
- Human dangers
- Loss of play space





3. Parents' fears

- The culture of fear
- Over-protection of children
- Myth of "Stranger-danger"

4. National and local authorities' play policies inadequate or non-existent

- Failure from national policy to local planning
- Misuse of funds, prioritising adult (male) recreation over children's right to play.
- The underlying problem: Politicians don't understand play





5. Inadequate spaces or facilities for play

- Play in the local neighbourhood is no longer a safe option.
- Playgrounds and designated play spaces are failing children.

6. Authorities', institutions' and professionals' fear of litigation

- The “compensation culture” and its effect on children’s play opportunities.





7. Excessive pressure for educational achievement

- Unhealthy competition
- Excessive hours of study

8. No recognition of or provision for play in schools

- The threat to school play-time
- No more “learning through play”





9. Structured, programmed leisure time

- Too many structured activities too young
- Programmed recreation is not a substitute for play

10. Technology and the commercialisation of children's play

- Computer games replace active social play. What is being lost?
- Risk of addiction and desensitisation to violence.
- Children are targets of manipulative mass-marketing.





11. Treatment of children in institutions (hospitals, orphanages, sanatoriums, residential centres)

- Staff not aware of importance of play, lacking motivation
- No play space or unsuitable play equipment
- Inadequate funding and lack of resources

12. Exclusion, discrimination, segregation and marginalisation



- Discrimination and marginalisation of girls.
- Exclusion, marginalisation and segregation of children with disabilities.
- Exclusion through racism and other forms of discrimination.



13. Poverty and the struggle to survive

- The right to play is the first to be forgotten in a crisis.

14. Child labour and exploitation

- Working children have no time to play.
- Children's work and exploitation take many forms.



Do these only affect poor and developing countries?

How many might be problems in Northern Ireland?

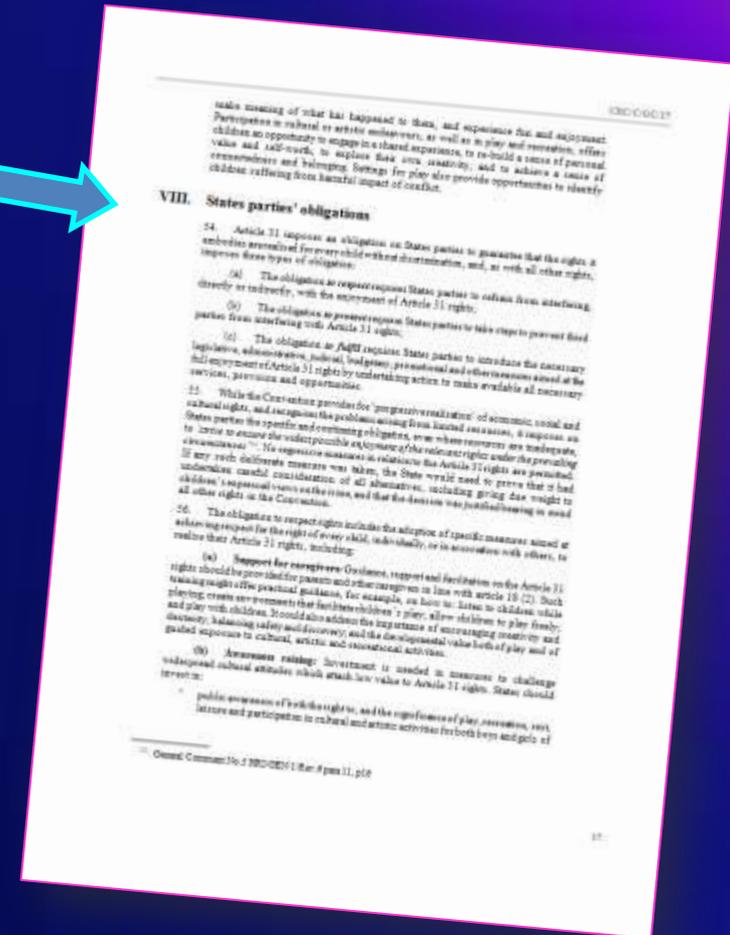
My opinion

Is this an issue in Northern Ireland?	Not an issue	Minor	Major
1. Adult attitudes to play	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2. Unsafe environments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3. Parents' fears	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4. Inadequate policies for play	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
5. Lack of play-space	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
6. Fear of litigation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
7. Academic pressure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
8. Threats to play in schools	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
9. Over-programmed leisure time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
10. Technology and commercialisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
11. Play for children in institutions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
12. Discrimination and exclusion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
13. Poverty and the struggle to survive	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Child labour and exploitation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

We need a diagnostic tool (a kind of Article 31 compliance check-list)

The General Comment has a section on “States Parties’ obligations” (paras. 54-59) which could be the basis for a diagnostic tool or quality check-list.

- Such a tool could be applied by local authorities and government agencies themselves as a form of self-assessment to help improve services, plan for change where needed, recognise and share examples of good practice etc.
- It could also be used by independent agencies like Playboard, NICCY and community groups as a way of calling duty-bearers to account.
- As long as we have a child-friendly version, it could be used by children themselves to claim and defend their rights.



To sum up:

- A. Empower children to claim and defend their rights.
- B. Support parents as advocates and defenders of children's rights.
- C. Enable duty-bearers, raising their awareness and building their capacity to fulfil their obligations to children.



Thanks for listening



Nicaraguan children's campaign banner:
"Children and young people defending our right to play, For health,
learning, development, happiness and a life without violence."