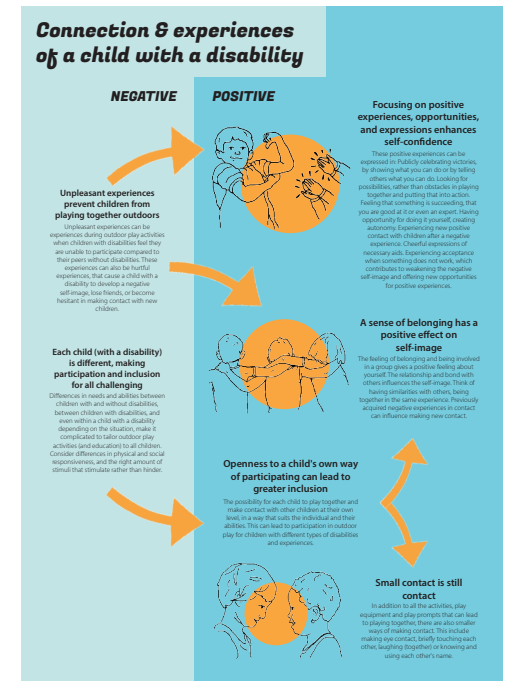
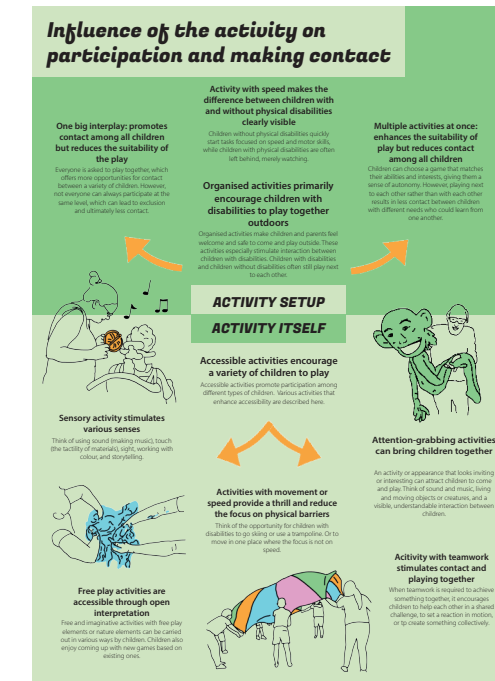


# SMALL CONTACT

## Breaking social-emotional barriers for children with disabilities for inclusive outdoor play

This graduation project explores the social-emotional context of inclusive outdoor play. The objective is to enhance participation in outdoor play for children with disabilities by focusing on inclusion. To achieve inclusion in play, the needs of all users in an outdoor play area must be addressed. This project examines themes and elements that facilitate small contact between children with and without disabilities, aiming to increase participation in outdoor play.



### Context

There is a recognised need to promote outdoor play among children with disabilities, as it has a positive effect only impacts their physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development. However, children with disabilities engage in outdoor play less frequently than typically developing children, because of various barriers they experience.

### Collaboration with 'Samen Spelen??'

This project involves a close collaboration with the client 'Samen Spelen?'. The multiprofessional team from the consortium 'Samen Spelen??' at 'Hogeschool Utrecht' are developing two toolkits for child therapists to facilitate inclusive outdoor play for children with physical disabilities (4-12 years old) and their parents. One toolkit focuses on the physical context, the other on the social context.

### Research approach

To explore the social-emotional context, several research and design activities were conducted: starting with literature research and attending inclusive play activities. This was followed by participation in two generative sessions with children and an interview with an orthopedagogue to gain more insights into the emotional context.

### 3 found main themes

The findings from these activities led to three overarching main themes that have an influence on the social-emotional context of inclusive outdoor play. These themes formed the basis of three conclusion posters. The 3 themes and their related posters:

- Theme: 'The environment: people and place'  
Poster: 'Influence of the environment and bystanders on outdoor play and making contact'
- Theme: 'Inclusive outdoor play activities'  
Poster: 'Influence of the activity on participation and making contact'
- Theme: 'Children's inner world'  
Poster: 'Connection & experiences of a child with a disability'

### Small contact & Design goal

The principle 'Small contact', identified on the third conclusion poster, was selected as the main focus of this project. Small contact refers to safe, accessible, and natural contact, without the need for full play. The facilitation of small contact creates openness to explore contact with others and children's own ways of participating.

To grasp the focus in one sentence, a design goal is created:

*My design goal is to facilitate/create small equal contact between children with disabilities and children without disabilities that do not know each other, at an outside play area in their neighbourhood, which positively influences the participation of children with a disability*

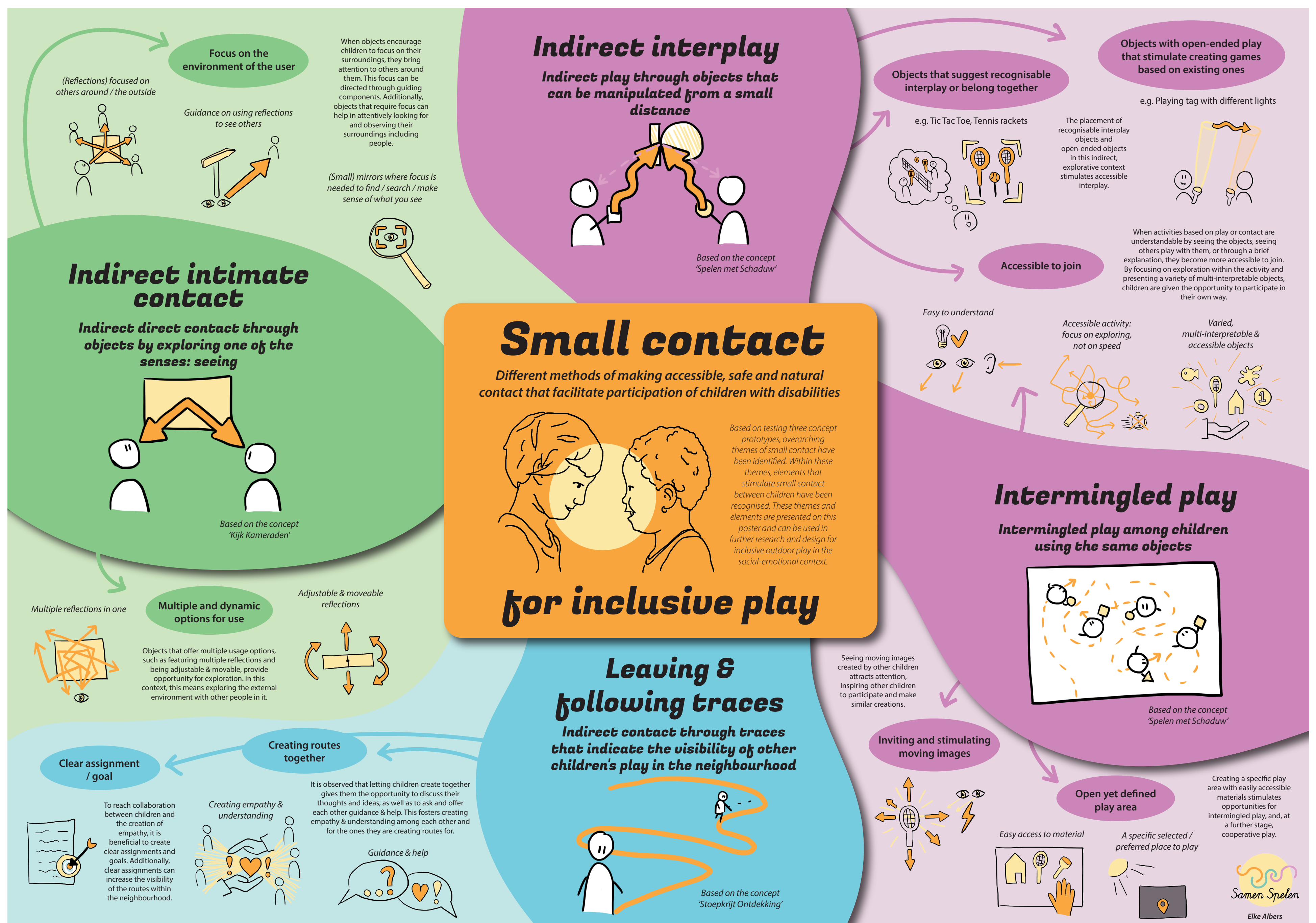
### Insights and conclusions

Based on this design goal, various brainstorming cycles were conducted, resulting in three concepts: 'Kijk Kameraden', 'Spelen met Schaduw' and 'Stoepkrijt Ontdekking'. 'Kijk Kameraden' focuses on making (eye) contact through the use of reflections and mirrors. With 'Spelen met Schaduw' children can play by creating shadows and reacting to the shadows created by others. 'Stoepkrijt Ontdekking' encourages children to leave traces in the neighbourhood that help them and others to get to know the area, play opportunities and each other.

Testing prototypes of these concepts with children in context provided insights into themes and elements that facilitate small contact between children. These themes are:

- Indirect intimate contact:** Indirect direct contact through objects by exploring one of the senses: seeing
  - Indirect interplay:** Indirect play through objects that can be manipulated from a small distance
  - Intermingled play:** Intermingled play among children using the same objects
  - Leaving and following traces:** Indirect contact through traces that indicate the visibility of other children's play in the neighbourhood
- These themes and their corresponding elements are presented in the poster 'Small contact'.

The results can be utilised by 'Samen Spelen??' to develop their toolkits. The use of these results can help encourage child therapists to stimulate children with physical disabilities to make small contact with new children, without the need for adult facilitation of play activities and making contact.



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