

Play

A brief Note on our philosophy in design



The **Recreation**
Company Limited

PLAYGROUND * MANAGEMENT * DESIGN

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Play

“A Child has a Right to Play” United Nations

Children’s Play is a natural part of human development

It involves learning about life and the world we live in

Vitally important to a healthy development

Child centred

Assists in bringing balance to a child’s life

Soothes stresses

Imaginative and creative

Quiet, gentle, big, rough

Solo and or shared

Time out

This especially from the adult world

Relies on

Time to play

Space in which to play

Permission to take time and space to play

Safety

From other aspects of life

Play is inherently dangerous

It often involves experimentation and risk

Play is linked to child focussed opportunity rather than adult centric values

Children's Play is by Children for Children

Design For Play

The Modern Play Environment

The environment in which children find play opportunities is increasingly controlled by adults, for adults and adult values

- Time in which actual play can happen is also reducing as our lives become busier and more regimented.
- Children's Play / Leisure activities are big business. Focus gets turned on and off in a cyclic pattern based on business principals.
- Children are often not the focus of the play opportunities they are presented with.
- Some forms of play children are encouraged into are dangerous and exploitive
- Adults often confuse activity with play.
- Real free time is increasingly being structured

None of this is new, it is just in New Zealand at least, there has been a notable and silent shift in children's lifestyles over the last 40 years.

This shift is in parallel with that of society and adult culture. There is a whole stack of new pressures on all age sectors.

Children Desperately need to fit into life

- Children need love and care and need to fit in to family life.
- Adults and societal needs are things children need to fit into and learn to work around
- Children must learn the rules and how to comfortably live with them while they grow up and not find out later in life
- Children must learn consequences as they develop in their childhood.
- Children must contribute in real ways to their families wellbeing and life.
- Children must learn about responsibility for self and others
- Children must learn about commitment and effort.
- Children must learn about themselves and what makes them tick as an individual
- Missing these elements is a disaster for us all.

Children need to attain an inner balance in life.

Play is an effective way they use to assist in achieving needed balance.

They require permission, free time, and space in which to play.

**Time is a critical factor in providing play opportunities
as is a lack of outside intervention.**

Personal Development

Play assists children to develop creativity, a sense of adventure, confidence, resourcefulness, social skills, experience of success and failure and resilience.

For evidence look at the children of the second world war. Those that survived and also not overly damaged by the war later displayed most of the above attributes.

Even in today's world of **"Super-Doopers"** and **"Wizz Bangs"**, simply watch children with a plain cardboard box. This will become almost anything they want it to be. From a house to a speeding steam powered aeroplane.

Or a trampoline, basketball and hoop, bicycle, walking the dog, or digging in the sand or a pile of dirt.

Design Approach

In designing play facilities, all I am really doing is providing a space where children can create their own play activity.

Children value, sitting, observing, resting and being a part of the scene by association as well as being actively involved.

Free Choice is an important need. This necessitates actually having opportunities to actually make choices of, what, where, how, who with and why.

The more choices the wider the range of needs can be met.

In this play space the school wanted to provide for a wide range of choice.

- A range of structures and multiple choices at every turn
- Scaffolded physical and emotional progressions
- Solo and cooperative play
- Passive and active play
- Long term sustainability of interest
- Complimentary appearance with treed back drop
- Different and special

Aims in my design approach include

1. Focus on children's physical, emotional and social needs
2. Involve children in the design process wherever practicable
3. Integrate these needs into a cohesive play environment
4. Assist the school to gain community support of the play facility concept
5. Enable the community to be actively involved at a level which suits them
6. Encourage real levels of recycling/ repurposing materials
7. Ensure that the finished product is both of a high quality and provides what was aimed for.

Health Status.

1. Many of our population are unfit, sedentary, and becoming increasingly overweight.
2. Increasing incidents of asthma and diabetes are also compounded by alarming emotional and mental health issues our children are experiencing
3. A look at New Zealand health statistics today is shocking at best.
4. Schools make a real effort on these issues and play is a powerful tool in assisting with good health outcomes

Rope, Pole and Tyre Structures

These ideas came out of the concepts of a rope from a tree, tree forts, building bridges, balancing on fences, and walking over bridges on the handrails, jumping farm gates, climbing trees, climbing, and falling down banks, cutting tracks in gorse country and suffering for it, and exploring secret places.

Meeting with play designers worldwide, and also studying Adventure Education and teaching in this area has been instrumental in adapting these philosophies in play design

The aims in my designs are to provide opportunities...

1. Adventure at an individual level
2. Challenge via layered skill focussed progressions,
3. Physical activity (especially for the core muscular structures)
4. Motor skills and coordination
5. Social skills including, creating space to play around others, making choices on a continual basis, play activity in a caring and cooperative manner
6. Take time out for observation, sharing, solo reflection.

Play Shelters and Towers

1. Always a favourite of children.
2. Schools have a unique set of needs which include times of very high use and loadings.
3. Our towers are relatively big on space. This allows for both through traffic and those who want to stop and observe or meet. Size lessens the congestion which lowers stress levels and allows for differing needs and activities.
4. A real weatherproof roof is included, so that the structure can be used in less-than-ideal conditions be that rain or very hot sunshine.
5. The key element is providing choices. With at least two deck heights one can be used for meeting on and quieter activity while the other can accommodate higher energy play.
6. From the upper decks many clip-on items can be included from ladders, slides, and fire poles to climbing walls, bridges, and ramps.
7. These structures can easily be locally built to a high standard and finished to suit.

We only use Quality Materials

1. New certified construction poles and synthetic ropes or 24 to 28 mm diameter.
2. Carefully selected tyres from large truck to loader tyres and a range of custom fixings.
3. Firepoles are custom made and slides are purchased to fit the application.
4. New premium timber (NZ Grown and processed)
5. Every play facility has its own Engineers PS1 Certification.

Community Cohesiveness

A strongly linked community is a resilient one. All for one and one for all when the flag goes up.

Our current epidemic is a good example of community need to be linked and not isolated. This is regardless of socio-economic status.

This current experience is providing an excellent dress rehearsal for the future.

We have developed systems which enable communities of interest to work together to achieve great results. Each community does it their own way.

However, the opportunity is to work together and inclusively bring shy or more isolated members into contact with others.

An added benefit is that you have many owners of the facility who feel protective about it and will look after it as needed.

Conclusion

Permission, time, and space to Play is what we as adults need to ensure every child has.

Rodie

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