ChildsPlay research translation case studies – Centre for the Built Environment and Health, UWA

Mullaloo Community Kindergarten

Background

- Playground provision at Mullaloo Community Kindergarten falls within the remit of City of Joondalup. In 2012, the Kindy was scheduled for playground replacement – approx. $85,000 was allocated and the teacher in charge (Cherilyn Hotchkin) asked to select playground equipment from manufacturer catalogues, and rubber softfall was specified.

- Cherilyn negotiated with the Council to be able to have more flexibility in the way the allocated funds was spent – in particular she wanted to be able to create a more creative play space that included some natural elements, and with sand instead of rubber softfall given the importance of sand as a play medium. She was also conscious of the significant cost of prefabricated play equipment and rubber softfall, and felt that a more engaging and ‘value for money’ playspace could be created through a combination of good design, natural elements and play equipment.

- The UWA Childsplay’s project provided Cherilyn with some examples of park and school playspaces that have taken more of this approach.

The resulting new Playspace

Cherilyn worked with a consultant from the City of Joondalup to plan a playground with a variety of play spaces that were connected with pathways. Sand is used for one pathway to connect fixed play climbing equipment with the large sandpit with a fixed conveyor belt at one end. The other pathway is woodchips. Some softfall was placed under the swings and flying fox. The new playground incorporates some prefabricated play equipment, however is enhanced by play equipment made from more natural materials, including musical instruments, wooden animals, a ‘fairy den’ and a bridge.

Our aim was to provide an environment which is exciting and stimulating and we have achieved this as the children are always asking when they can go outside to play

A sensory garden has been planted with the children. The sensory garden is located amongst the circular fairy den area with a white Mulberry in the middle.

We have silkworm eggs ready to hatch so that the children can utilize the leaves for their growth ¹

Another sensory element is the musical instruments. These musical instruments make a wide range of sounds and the children are keen to explore them during their play. They can also be incorporated into our teaching program.

Children benefit when play environments are not totally static or fixed i.e. where elements can be moved around, modified, or loose items added.

Dressups, streamers and mushroom seats are some items we will add at different times so enhance creative play.

¹ All quotes from Cherilyn Hotchkin, Mullaloo Kindy
Some examples of how the Playspace integrates with learning outcomes:

A well designed outdoor Playspace can support an integrated and creative program that can address various learning areas and outcomes, often simultaneously. It can also facilitate both teacher directed and child directed learning.

**Literacy and The Arts**

Now with an inviting outdoor space that the children are so eager to use, the Kindy has started taking its literacy and music program outside. The nature play area lends itself towards storytelling and role play.

*The sheer delight on the faces of the four year olds clearly displayed their enjoyment in retelling the story of General McTiger as they incorporated the musical instruments. We are planning on using this area for dramatizing “We’re Going on a Bear Hunt” and “The Three Billy Goats Gruff” later this term.*

The children are also encouraged to make and create their own music and stories in this area.

*We are using the stump of an old tree as a seat and have created a reading corner for story time and role play.*

**Science**

*Our sensory garden and tyres for planting vegetables enable children to explore and be involved in growth and changes occurring over a period of time in their play environment. They are involved in the whole process and then use the produce during cooking.*

The garden also promotes sensory development through exploring the variety of plants (selected by a student’s parent with a horticulture degree).

**Cooperative learning and team work**

The sand conveyor belt enables a large group of children to interact with one another and work together for a common goal.

*The children have pretended they are cooking in a restaurant kitchen, putting the plates on the conveyor belt and moving them along the belt to the restaurant. Other children took them off and served them to children sitting at tables.*

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*Integrating outdoor play with the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)*

Mullaloo Kindy highly values the importance of incorporating the EYLF into outdoor play. This can be achieved when an outdoor area has been planned carefully to maximize learning opportunities.

*We believe in promoting child directed learning opportunities through play and encouraging children to explore their creativity in the process.*

*While prefabricated play equipment has its place in the development of gross motor skills, a carefully planned nature playground use a range of natural elements which are interactive and are intriguing for children to explore.*

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