

Assessment of Designed Outdoor Playspaces as Learning Environments and Its Impact on Child's Wellbeing: A Case of Bhopal, India

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Abstract : Playing is the foremost stepping stone for childhood development. Play is an essential aspect of a child's development and learning because it creates meaningful enduring environmental connections and increases children's performance. The children's proficiencies are ever varying in their course of growth. There is innovation in the activities, as it kindles the senses, surges the love for exploration, overcomes linguistic barriers and physiological development, which in turn allows them to find their own caliber, spontaneity, curiosity, cognitive skills, and creativity while learning during play. This paper aims to comprehend the learning in play which is the most essential underpinning aspect of the outdoor play area. It also assesses the trend of playgrounds design that is merely hammered with equipment's. It attempts to derive a relation between the natural environment and children's activities and the emotions/senses that can be evoked in the process. One of the major concerns with our outdoor play is that it is limited to an area with a similar kind of equipment, thus making the play highly regimented and monotonous. This problem is often lead by the strict timetables of our education system that hardly accommodates play. Due to these reasons, the play areas remain neglected both in terms of design that allows learning and wellbeing. Poorly designed spaces fail to inspire the physical, emotional, social and psychological development of the young ones. Currently, the play space has been condensed to an enclosed playground, driveway or backyard which confines the children's capability to leap the boundaries set for him. The paper emphasizes on study related to kids ranging from 5 to 11 years where the behaviors during their interactions in a playground are mapped and analyzed. The theory of affordance is applied to various outdoor play areas, in order to study and understand the children's environment and how variedly they perceive and use them. A higher degree of affordance shall form the basis for designing the activities suitable in play spaces. It was observed during their play that, they choose certain spaces of interest majority being natural over other artificial equipment. The activities like rolling on the ground, jumping from a height, molding earth, hiding behind tree, etc. suggest that despite equipment they have an affinity towards nature. Therefore, we as designers need to take a cue from their behavior and practices to be able to design meaningful spaces for them, so the child gets the freedom to test their precincts.

Keywords : children, landscape design, learning environment, nature and play, outdoor play

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