



Let us Play!
Lessons and Reflections on Co-Creating Playful Cities – Johannesburg

A PAN Children seminar: 25 February 2015

Chaired by Andre Viviers: Education Specialist – Early Childhood Development, UNICEF
Presented by Ntsiki Mackay-Anderson – Founding Director of the Hummingbird Children’s Centre

BACKGROUND

The Hummingbird Children’s Centre is a play and early childhood education (ECE) organisation that promotes Playwork. It advocates for the urgent need to create and provide stimulating play environments and programmes. Bringing together local knowledge, artistic practices and progressive Playwork and ECE approaches, Hummingbird works towards the vision of co-creating ‘Playful Cities’. Hummingbird has been providing vibrant play opportunities to children in inner-city Johannesburg since 2013 and has developed a unique approach to play provision through its pop-up playgrounds. This seminar reflected on the learning gained through its Playwork practice, the challenges encountered in establishing permanent play sites and how to get play provision onto local government agendas.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Ntsiki Mackay-Anderson is a play activist, researcher and founding director of the Hummingbird Children’s Centre. She has 17 years’ experience working with children in formal and informal settings in Johannesburg and London, and 10 years in the non-profit sector in South Africa. With a multi-disciplinary research background rooted in Social Policy (BA, Bristol University), her undergraduate research on urban renewal and gentrification was published in the international peer-reviewed journal, Transactions. After completing her MA (Social Development, Wits), which looked at the lack of men in the early childhood education workforce, she established Hummingbird, a ‘think and do’ organisation focused on creating ‘Playful Cities’. Hummingbird’s practice-led research approach fuses her passion for Playwork, early childhood education, nature-based learning, craft and design, urban theory/planning and social theory and transformation. She has written and spoken on ‘Playful Cities’ and the emergence of Playwork in South Africa and is currently working towards a PhD at the African Centre for Cities (UCT), exploring the nexus between play and participatory urban planning, through action research; and is also working on a critical reader on the history and sociology of play in Africa.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE [PRESENTATION](#)

A key point to remember is that childhood development cannot happen without play. Play is essential, should be taken seriously and the ‘schoolification’ of the early years should be avoided. Hummingbird is a learning organisation that promotes Playwork and the creation and advocacy for safe and stimulating play spaces for children.

The organisation aims to achieve playful cities for children.



Playfulness is essential to creativity, innovation, vibrant and productive societies and economies, and is thus a valuable social investment.

‘Play as a path not as a destination’

Healthy, child-centered cities are greener and more playful, and contribute to healthier children.

The dominant rhetoric is ‘play as progress’.

When creating spaces the ‘blue economy’ design theory is adopted. This entails responding to basic needs with what one has; introduce innovations inspired by nature; offering more with less. Waste does not exist. Any by-product is the source for a new product.

Find out from children what they want!

Three approaches to play for children are:

FOREST SCHOOL

Learning in and from the natural environment not only develops children’s physical and cognitive competencies, it also keeps them healthy. Extensive research shows that children who spend a significant time playing/learning outdoors each day:

- have fewer infections and allergies
- are less stressed
- have better motor skills
- are less obese
- have well developed social skills
- have fewer conflicts
- are more creative and imaginative

Research and anecdotal claims show forest school approaches are good for children.

A 2003 study (University of Heidelberg) compared the performance of children from 50 forest and standard kindergartens Results: In various categories - ‘cognitive tasks’; ‘social behaviour’; ‘creativity’; ‘physical ability’, graduates of forest schools outperformed their peers and possessed a clear advantage. Benefits for the girl child - girls especially benefited from having

REGGIO EMILIA

The environment as third teacher

Children can best create meaning and make sense of their world through environments which support complex, varied, sustained, and changing relationships between people, the world of experience, ideas and the many ways of expressing ideas.

PLAYWORK

All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate. Play is a biological, psychological, and social necessity, and is fundamental to the healthy development and wellbeing of individuals and communities.

Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed, and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play by following their own instincts, ideas, and interests, in their own way, for their own reasons.

The prime focus and essence of Playwork is to support and facilitate the play process and this should inform the development of play policy, strategy, training, and education.

For Playworkers, the play process takes precedence and Playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult-led agendas.

The role of the Playworker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play.

The Playworker’s response to children and young people playing is based on a sound up-to-date knowledge of the play process, and reflective practice.

attended forest school. The teachers gave them higher credit for being more self-confident, physically, emotionally and intellectually

Playworkers recognize their own impact on the playspace and also the impact of children and young people's play on the Playworker.

Playworkers choose an intervention style that enables children and young people to extend their play. All Playworker intervention must balance risk with the developmental benefit and wellbeing of children



GAPS IN THE POLICY ENVIRONMENT

Lack of public space allocated to resident associations and CBOs for the provision of play.

The process of allocating underutilised spaces needs to be more efficient and user-friendly, and lease agreements should be more supportive and enabling.

Urban planning and legislation need to be more child-centred, for example: how does the new bylaw on the required rubber surfacing of playgrounds benefit children?

Relevant departments such as Parks, Social and Community Development should have a dedicated desk on play provision working across all sectors. This should also deal with the built environment/play spaces as well as play services – centres, clubs and holiday programmes

There should be a far greater public spending commitment to realise children's universal right to play provision.

DISCUSSION

Question/comment	Response
What is your experience in developing <i>play associations</i> in South Africa?	We want to operate where we live. Not looking for massive funding, perhaps donations would work. It is an experiment. People need to volunteer time, including parents. Need to get local people into the idea that children need space. That is what we are trying to do but there are challenges. We talk to community development.
With reference to a main road project where people live in flats and there are few opportunities for children to play. We need to get communities involved and mobilised, as there is no obvious park in the area. What opportunities are there for <i>playing in an urban environment</i> beyond parks?	<i>Pop up and Play</i> does not use specific toys. A limited amount of space is needed and it does not have to be a green space as such. In Paddington roads were closed off during public holidays, quite a guerrilla tactic! You may need to get temporary permission. Blocking off streets, there is a policy in Bristol called Playful Streets and we may be able to document and share what we are doing.
Who are you referring to in <i>local government</i> when referring to a more integrated approach?	Various departments at local government level. ECD focuses on during school time, but what happens outside of school remains unknown.
<i>School playgrounds</i> could be used when schools are closed. This is where the children live. Put up the equipment in the schools. Schools that will cooperate can be identified and hopefully teachers will be involved. There are resources that are dormant during holidays.	I have been to quite a few schools that open up to communities over the weekends. Encouraging to see this happening on the ground. Where there are deserted playgrounds we need to look at options.
<i>Pop-up play groups</i> are being run in Cosmo City every Friday for three hours with churches and practitioners. Parents have even trained. The model has been very successful. Find out more about vacant spaces and use them!	We have experienced problems of vandalism and things going missing. However, sometimes children need a bit of a boost to get more creative and use their imagination. Could box a 'pop up' system in a mobile system (trailer)
Are there <i>existing safe parks</i> where young people come and play? How about partnering with groups who have no resources?	Inner-city Johannesburg parks and at street festivals remains our first priority at this stage.
We are busy with a <i>child-friendly city framework</i> with the Department of Social Development. There are school holiday programmes running throughout the year. Child protection committees are running in each region.	
Have you done any work on children with disabilities and their right to play?	Once the adventure playground is established these children will be catered for.
How do you ensure the safety of children especially when think about pop-up areas?	We are not an NGO/NPO looking at a range of sites. We focus on our community and others on

	theirs. The idea is that other communities are inspired and follow suit. We do not take over the responsibilities of parents. In terms of security adults and parents must provide security, this is the norm internationally.
Regarding the London adventure park, there was tremendous involvement of <i>adults</i> whereas in KZN children are on their own	
We need to identify schools that can be used for play therapy.	
What are your approaches to <i>advocacy</i> ?	We are learning and networking. This seminar is the start of a bigger network. We 'just do it' and invite others to be part of the conversation. Will make use of the PAN Children platform.
With <i>Chance to Play</i> we came up with the idea of a Play Forum which community leaders need to drive. Community members should identify needs as this is the only way to go forward. We all need to speak with one voice. You could tell your story to the rest of the country.	
We will use World Play Day (28 May) to leverage and promote the idea. We need to reclaim the play spaces. .	

CLOSING COMMENTS

These concepts will evolve and improve over time. Globally play is seen as important central to developing as humans. Some years ago Joubert Park was reclaimed for children and the community.

This issue can best be taken forward by local government.

There is a need for resources to start up, and these could be small amounts.

The *Food and Fun Programme* was one successful South African approach.

There are many areas that can be used for play and we should use them.

There are a full range of approaches and many different ways to play.