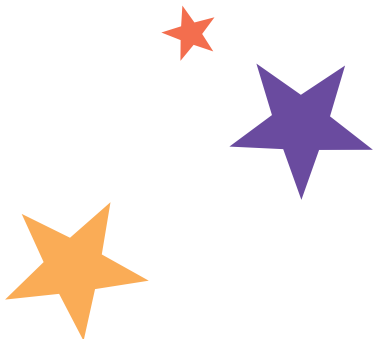


Play and Folklore

SPECIAL EDITION

Playground Redevelopment Project
Princes Hill Primary School, 2011



From the Editors

***Play and Folklore* no 58, October 2012**

For the first time since we began publishing in 1981, we are offering an issue with just one contribution. *Play and Folklore* presents the documentation of a play project planned and carried out by a group of 11-12 year old children. It is a large and ambitious project – the creation of a play space of their own design – made possible by the understanding and support of their school, their teachers and their parents. It demonstrates what can be achieved when children are given the authority and the means to develop a project around a subject on which they are the experts: play. It is also a revealing example of what the children's teacher recognises as a potent and positive approach to learning. As she writes in a comment at the end of the documentation: *It was clear that the project gave the children a powerful voice. They now saw themselves as strong, competent learners, able to construct knowledge and negotiate meaning... What started off as a project about the redesign of a playground ended up as a project around the concepts of student voice, active citizenship and democracy.*

We thank the school – school council, principal, teachers, parents and children – for allowing us to publish this important document. We acknowledge with pride the significant contribution to the project of one of our editors, Judy McKinty. And we welcome comments and contributions from our readers.

Gwenda Beed Davey, June Factor and Judy McKinty

Play and Folklore

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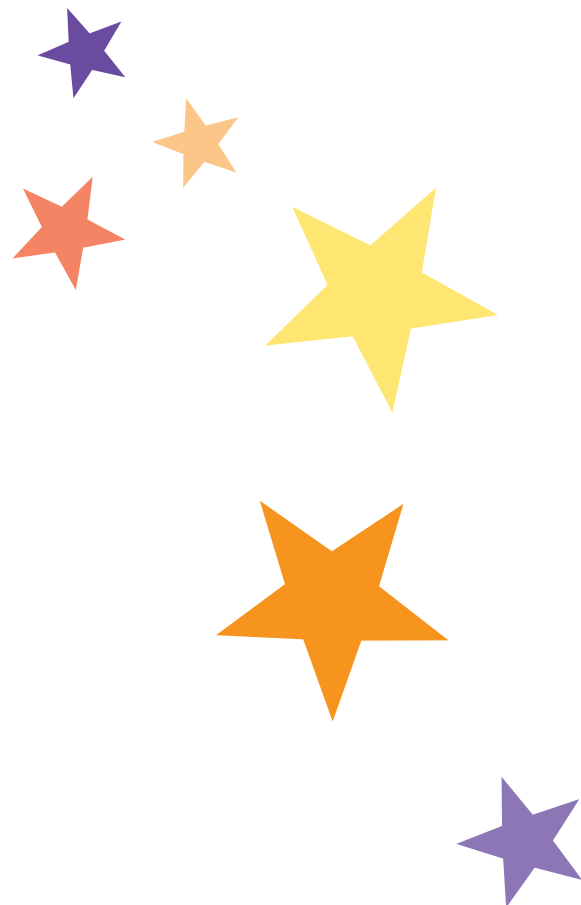
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Members of the Playground Redevelopment Group with their model of the new adventure playground

Playground Redevelopment Project Princes Hill Primary School, 2011

Shana Upiter with Grade Six students

Princes Hill Primary School is an inner-city Melbourne state school with approximately 430 students aged from five to twelve years. Over recent years there have been major building works within the school grounds. Prior to the preparation of a new landscape plan by landscape architects Urban Initiatives, a play specialist, Judy McKinty, was engaged to conduct a playground survey at the school.

The survey revealed that the change which had had the most impact on the children's play – the thing they felt most passionate about – was the removal of a large senior adventure playground to make way for a portable classroom. In keeping with the school's aim to develop a strong community through 'meaningful and authentic collaboration'¹, a small group of Grade Six children, with teachers Shana Upiter and Pat McKay as collaborators and facilitators, formed the Playground Redevelopment Group, with the intention of designing a new senior adventure playground in consultation with the landscape architects and children from all levels of the school.

This article is an edited version of Shana Upiter's documentation of the project. Shana's notes are presented in black text and the children's comments are in coloured text.



Overview of the project

At the beginning of 2011, the school saw as a priority the redevelopment of its playground. In December 2010, Judy McKinty presented the school with her review of the playground entitled *Tradition and Change: A playground survey of Princes Hill Primary School*. Her review methodology included conducting observations and conversations with children in the playground. Very many wonderful findings emerged, particularly the children's use of the strange metal structure they called the 'Cat and Mouse' near the entrance to the school.² Until the review, the teachers had not understood its significance.

What was made evident through the report was 'the strong relationship that can develop between play and place, and...the rich play and learning experiences that can emerge when children feel a sense of ownership of their playground and are able to play freely among themselves'.³

The school leadership, led by principal Esme Capp, realised that in order for the children to form a strong connection to the playground, they needed to be included in its redevelopment. Acting as both the clients and designers, the children would have invaluable input into the design. This would also provide them with an opportunity to learn in a real-life situation, alongside professionals. This was particularly important to Princes Hill, which works within a socio-cultural context and whose pedagogical practice values learning as a collaborative process.

In February a group of Grade Six children – Tessa Grossi, Patrick Hayes, Kosta Lontos, Rafi Lochert, Aidan McInnes and Ben Reeder – with teachers Shana Upiter and Pat McKay, were selected to participate in the project. Another Grade Six child, David Verrocchi, became interested and joined the group at the measurement stage. We had our first

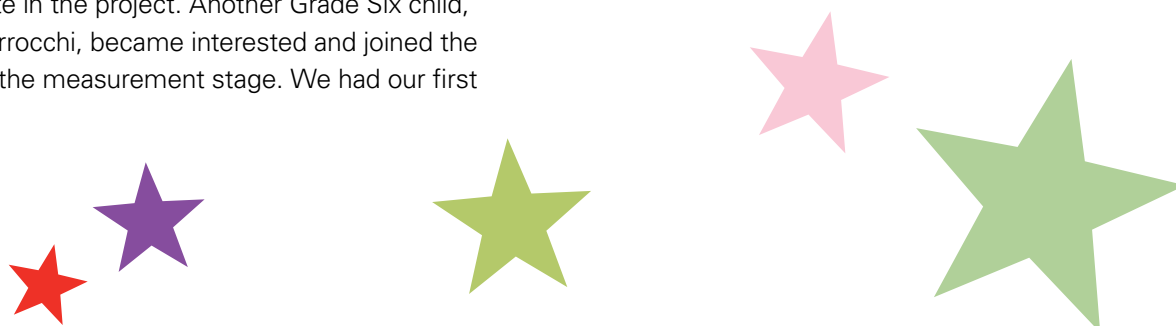
meeting with Heather Graham and Vincent Vignuoli – members of the school's Facilities Committee – as well as Katherine and Travis from Urban Initiatives landscape architects. Heather, a practising landscape architect, was entrusted with liaising with Urban Initiatives. The children's input became an exploration into a new senior school adventure playground, which they presented to Council in the form of a scale model at the end of the year.

The project eventually resulted in a landscape masterplan of the school, to be implemented over five years, with the children's design for a new senior adventure playground incorporated in the plan.

This article aims to make visible their learning through the project.



The 'Cat and Mouse'
Photographer: Judy McKinty





The 'old' adventure playground

In her report, Judy McKinty outlined a number of issues relating to play at the school, and described the importance to the children of the 'old' senior adventure playground and its role in their play:

ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

INTERRUPTIONS TO PLAY TRADITIONS

Several changes have occurred at the school which have altered the playground, and this, in turn, has had an effect on the children's play, particularly in the senior year levels. Major changes, from the children's play perspective, include the construction and relocation of buildings, redesign of playing areas and the removal of play equipment. Of these, the action that has had the most impact was the removal of the senior adventure playground, to make way for a portable Grade 5/6 building at the end of the senior oval. Other changes affecting the children's play are the building of a gymnasium and installation of new play activity stations in an area which had previously contained accessible shrubs and bushes.

THE 'OLD' ADVENTURE PLAYGROUND

Play values

The design of the old adventure playground incorporated diverse and interesting elements for an older age group. It provided physical challenges on different levels – particularly important for older boys – and the chance to go in, on, under, over, around and through the structures. Some of the platforms were high enough for children to run underneath while playing Tiggy.

It had a range of natural materials – wooden structures, rocks, stones, soil – to support different types of play, from piling up wood chips to flat-out running, chasing, climbing, sliding, balancing and crawling through tunnels. These types of activities help to build confidence and support a wide range of physical abilities.

During my discussions with children it was interesting to discover that one of the current popular activities for senior boys (and some girls) is Parkour (or Reflex). Parkour is the art of moving through the environment as swiftly and effectively as possible using only the human body and the buildings and other structures in the area...At Princes Hill, the boys play Parkour in the senior playing area...The long metal boundary fence has many dents, possibly from feet pushing against it in pursuit of this or other physical challenges...

The old adventure playground also provided opportunities for imagination and role-playing games. Grade Five boys said they had used the space underneath a raised platform to play 'Shops' or as the 'jail' in a game of 'Cops and Robbers'. Opportunities for this type of imaginative play among older children are often lacking in school playgrounds, with children walking around or just sitting and talking in groups. The Grade Five boys said that they often sit in the 'passive' area, but 'it's boring'.

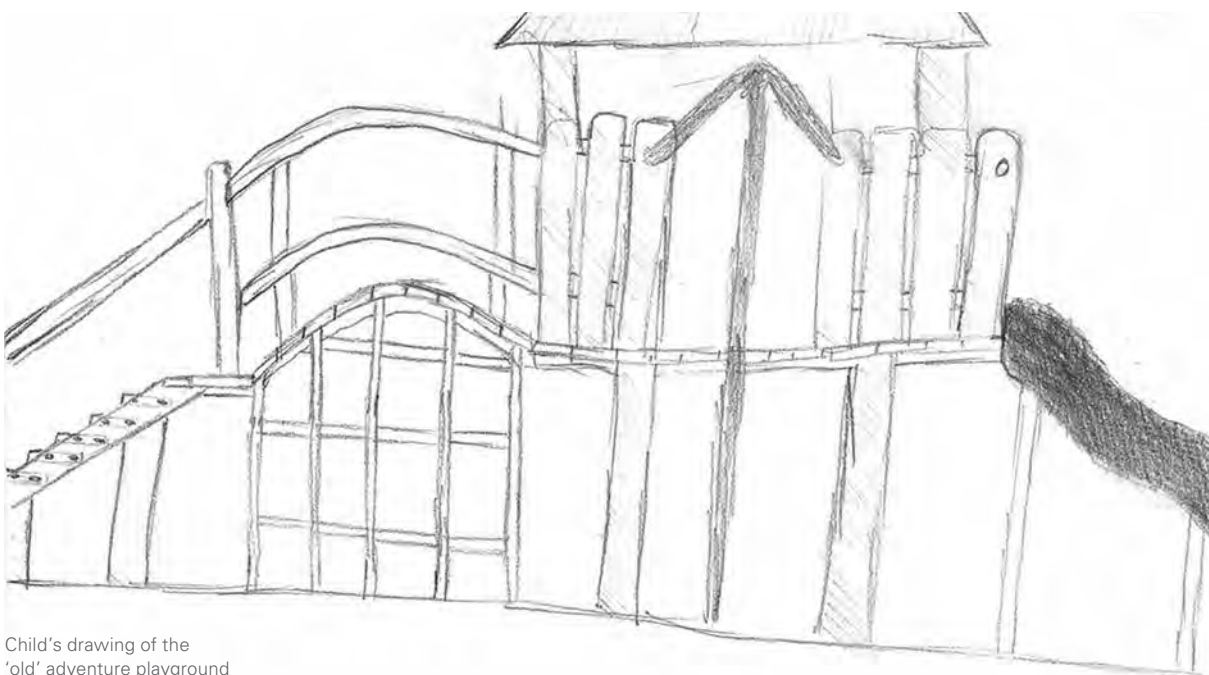


'Community' of play

The old adventure playground also fostered a 'community' of play, as the structures seemed to have formed a loosely enclosed space within which the play activities could take place – a sort of play arena. The design encouraged social interaction as children moved through the space and all over the structures as they played. In contrast, the linear design of the play activity stations, while useful for physical activity, is not as supportive of this type of 'community' play and suggests a more formal approach – several boys believe this area was designed as an obstacle course, although they do not use it for this purpose.

Rite of passage

The old adventure playground was like a rite of passage for children at the school. Some boys explained that it was something to look forward to when they were younger: 'You were only allowed to come into this area when you were [in Grade] 3, 4, 5, 6, and when we were in Grade Two we were all really looking forward to coming onto it'. 'When we were getting close to the end of the year, we were, like, "Oh, we can't wait 'til Grade Three", and one of the things we'd think about in Grade Three was that massive playground'.⁴



Child's drawing of the 'old' adventure playground



Gathering information

Together with landscape architects Urban Initiatives, the group decided to develop a school survey to find out from the school community what they wanted in a new playground.

The survey was given to teachers with the invitation for their neighbourhood⁵ to either complete it as a group or to give it to children to complete individually.

We sent out a survey so as to get an idea of what students wanted. I was surprised by how

similar each request was. We also had to make our own design of what we wanted. I based mine on what I thought the new playground needed, as well as aspects of the old playground. I was happy with the results of the survey and design, especially the way we were able to express our feelings about a new playground. – Aidan

Dear teachers,

The Playground Redevelopment Group has made this survey for you to ask the children in your class for their ideas on the new playground. They could show their ideas through multiple forms of media such as:

1. Writing
2. Drawing
3. Building a model
4. Or some other way of your choice

Please set aside a time for the children to complete the survey- half an hour to an hour at least - and after that if it is not complete it can be sent home. This survey needs to be handed in by Thursday the 31st of March.

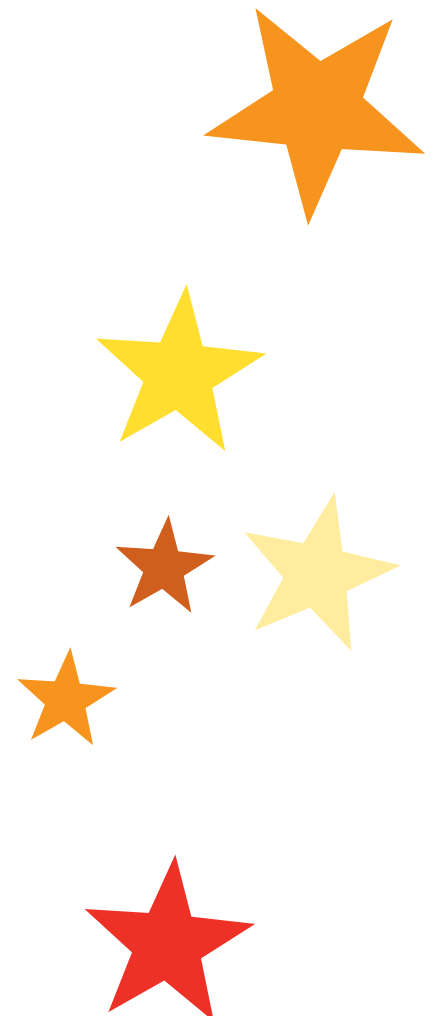
We will be setting up a display of all the children's ideas in the library.

Each of these ideas will be incorporated in the new playground design.

Thank you for your help,

The Playground Redevelopment Group

'We want a replacement not a substitute'.





Class Survey

Playground redevelopment

What differences have the changes to the school buildings made to how you use the outdoor space?

What are the three things you most enjoy doing on the play ground?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

What have you seen on other playgrounds that you found interesting?

What areas do you enjoy playing in and what do you do in them?

What kind of space would you like to go to on a hot summer's day?

Or a cold wintery one?

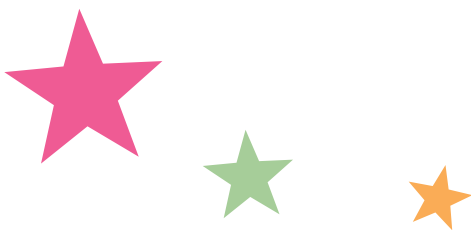
What would you like to see in a new playground?





Engaging the wider community

To get people to respond to the survey, we sent out an article in *Talking Point*.⁶ We also did a short act in assembly. I found the acting both fun and embarrassing. I believe we did quite well in the assembly acting, even though it was ridiculous and difficult to understand. – Aidan



From *Talking Point*, Term 1, No. 8,
Friday 25th March, 2011

“Play is a big part of learning for us and that hour and a half we have to play outside is a crucial part of our day and an even bigger part of our learning experience.”



Responses to the survey

The children answered the survey as a whole class or as individuals. Some responded with drawings or computer designs. Here are a few examples of the many responses received.

Group responses

Whole class. 3/4 N2?

Class Survey
Playground redevelopment

What differences have the changes to the school buildings made to how you use the outdoor space?

Its a lot better - A few unsafe bits where kids can leave the school without people seeing.

Miss the big playground!

What are the three things you most enjoy doing on the play ground?

1. Cops & Robbers.
2. Tiggly, Sport games, running track.
3. Monkey bars, Flying fox.

What have you seen on other playgrounds that you found interesting?

Carousels - Teacups	Painting wall
Giant slide ✓	Rock climbing wall
Swings	Giant rope.
Tennis court?	
Cricket pitch	mini maze made of hoolyng

What areas do you enjoy playing in and what do you do in them?

Two square courts	- basketball court
Soccer	- big oval
Zombie (made up)	- monkey bars
Basketball	- basketball courts

What kind of space would you like to go to on a hot summer's day?

Near monkey bars because of shade Under the verandah

Ramp near the Gym

Near passive play area

Or a cold wintery one?

Verandah near the exhaust

On the ovals to run

Forest area

Verandah drawing


Making cubbies in forest

What would you like to see in a new playground?

Forest area you are allowed to be in

Oval that folds away to be a pool

Fitness playground



Princes Hill Primary School



Group responses

Prep 2 whole class

Class Survey
Playground redevelopment

What differences have the changes to the school buildings made to how you use the outdoor space?

What are the three things you most enjoy doing on the play ground?

1. monkey bars, basketball, little kids playground equipment
2. football
- 3.

What have you seen on other playgrounds that you found interesting?

- net you can climb up a wall with/on
- swirley slide, goes round see
- swings

What areas do you enjoy playing in and what do you do in them?

cat + mouse in cat + mouse area
giants treasure on the ABC snake
football on mini oval
kartwheels near the stage

What kind of space would you like to go to on a hot summer's day?

- shadey
- somewhere where there's not hot metal
- a water park
- water slide


Or a cold wintery one?

- stay in classroom so won't get cold
- blankets

What would you like to see in a new playground?

- a cubby house
- more monkey bars
- water slide
- lots of climbing equipment
- tree house

Princes Hill Primary School




Individual responses

Class Survey

Playground redevelopment

What differences have the changes to the school buildings made to how you use the outdoor space? The removal of the old playground has led to me not playing as many games as I used to play.

What are the three things you most enjoy doing on the play ground?

1. ~~Going~~ Going on the wobbly bridge
2. ~~Looking~~ Looking for new hiding spots.
3. The rope steps on the triangles

What have you seen on other playgrounds that you found interesting?

- Swings • two levels • treehouses
- enclosed slides with twists and turns
- Long high rope bridges • See-saw
- Swimming pool

What areas do you enjoy playing in and what do you do in them?

- 5/6 Area - talking and games like police.
- Round the school - Gang & Tiggy
- Playground - hanging out.

What kind of space would you like to go to on a hot summer's day?

A shady tree or patio, preferably with a chair. Or a swimming pool

Or a cold wintery one?

A shelter of some sort, maybe with some games.

What would you like to see in a new playground?

Swings, two levels, trampolines

Princes Hill Primary School



Individual responses

Class Survey
Playground redevelopment

What differences have the changes to the school buildings made to how you use the outdoor space?

There is actually more space than I thought there was, so that's a good thing.

What are the three things you most enjoy doing on the play ground?

1. Rock climbing wall.
2. Talking in groups.
3. Sitting on exercise playground.

What have you seen on other playgrounds that you found interesting?

stand on this and spin. → This a bit like an exercise bike, but it is not electronic.
→ Stand on these bits and hold onto handles.

What areas do you enjoy playing in and what do you do in them?

Sitting on exercise playground and talking/relaxing

What kind of space would you like to go to on a hot summer's day?


SHADE

Or a cold wintery one?

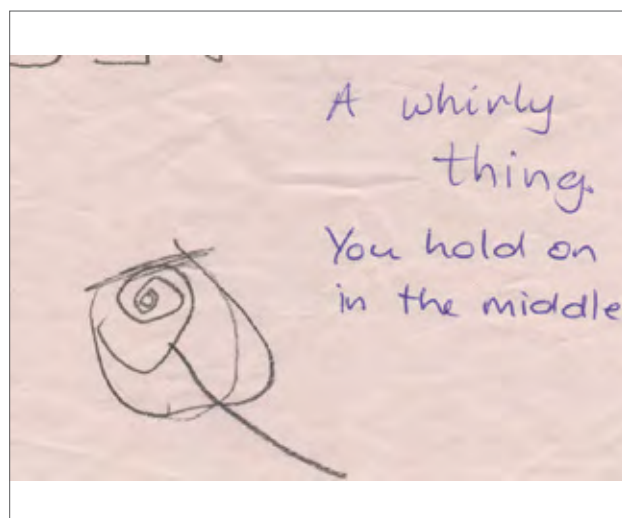
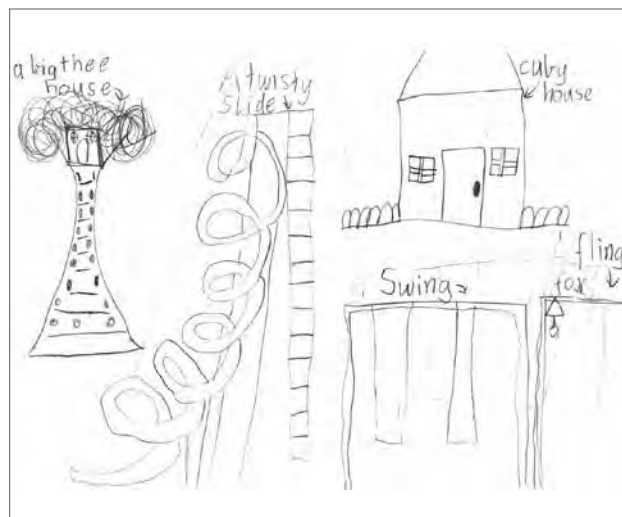
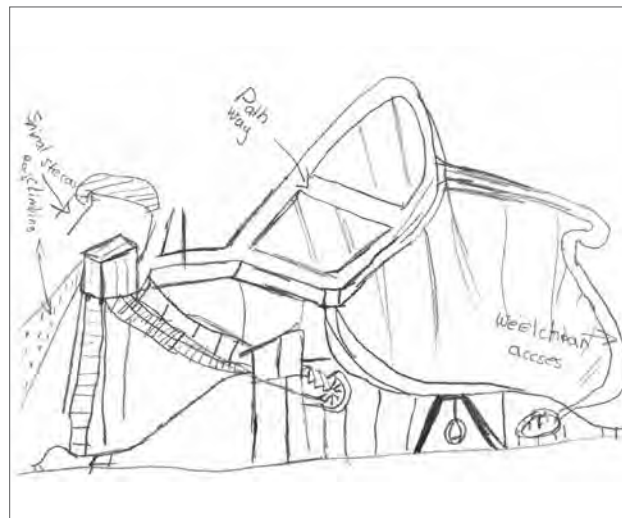
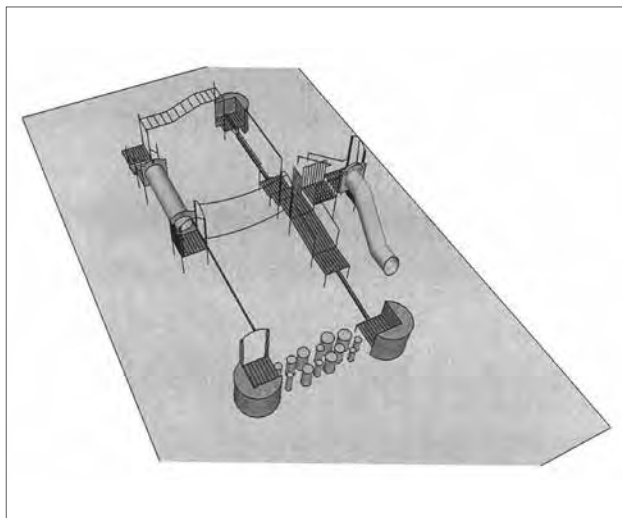
There isn't really any place for us to go, so I think we should make some sort of warm cosy place.

What would you like to see in a new playground?

- Slide.
- Two level playground
- foam pit.
- water fountain.
- Spinning pole.


Princes Hill Primary School

Visual responses





Analysing the surveys

From the children's conversations about the new playground, it became evident that they felt very strongly about the demolition of the old senior school playground. They expressed a deep sense of loss and anger and felt their play had changed because of it. Judy McKinty noted this in her report:

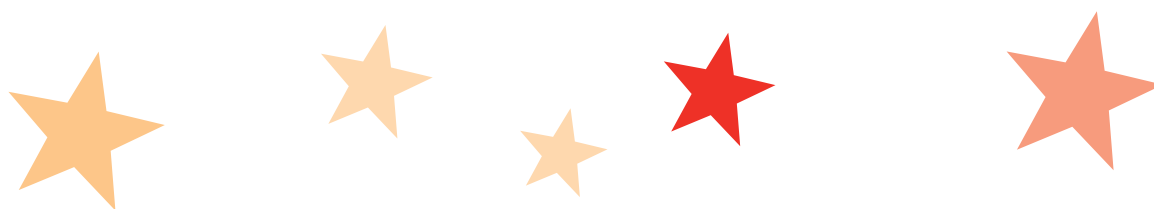
Effects of removal

It is natural for children to feel a sense of ownership of the playground. This is their territory – they spend a good deal of their childhood here. Some children know every part of the playground in detail, and others are more engaged in specific areas. For children who had the chance to play on the old adventure playground, the removal of such a large and diverse piece of playing equipment has reduced their choices and taken some of the fun out of recess and lunch time. It has also left some children with a great sense of loss and injustice. (One boy said wistfully that perhaps they could have 'a mini version of the old playground before the portable – just a mini version'.)

At present, there is less opportunity for the senior children to engage in really active, sustained physical play, apart from Tiggy and Soccer, so they have devised their own game to compensate for this (Parkour). They also need opportunities to play and have fun together in social groups...

The senior children appear to want and need more choices, challenges and a greater variety of play equipment – several mentioned moving apparatus like swings, a bigger flying fox...and play equipment on different levels. Grade 6 girls liked the suggestion of long skipping ropes that lots of people can use together. Being part of a group of friends is important to them...⁷





The children were very clear about the fact that they did not want a plastic and metal structure where the use is only one-dimensional. They were very clear that the reason they enjoyed the old playground so much was because it facilitated imaginative, open-ended play where children could play make-believe games. They especially liked the fact that it was raised off the ground and children could play on two levels (especially ball games). Children could also play Chasey, so the structure needed to be connected, unlike some new equipment that had been installed adjacent to this area. The old playground had been demolished because it was deemed unsafe during an Occupational Health and Safety inspection. The new equipment was supplied to the school through the BER (Building the Education Revolution⁸) program without the school having much say in the selection process. Its main aim was a fitness track which consisted of separate structures that allowed for very specific types of activity: a balancing beam for balancing on, a net and climbing wall for climbing, etc.

Why should the council approve the building of a new senior playground?

Raf: We do have a playground but when it was built there was no student opinions, so they built a playground just so we could have something, but there was no guarantee the students would enjoy it, because there was no consultation.

Ben: It's a bit of a peace treaty to stop us rioting because since they broke down the old playground there has been non-stop complaining about it.

Aidan: The new playground is just a compromise to stop kids from doing anything they want to do, just to have a playground there. Not necessarily a *good* playground. It was just a playground.

The following were key repeated words which came from the surveys:

★ Flying Fox

★ Nets

★ Walking Beams

★ Ramps

★ Bridge

★ Wood Pulley

★ Roundabouts

★ Paths

★ Tyres

★ Spinning net

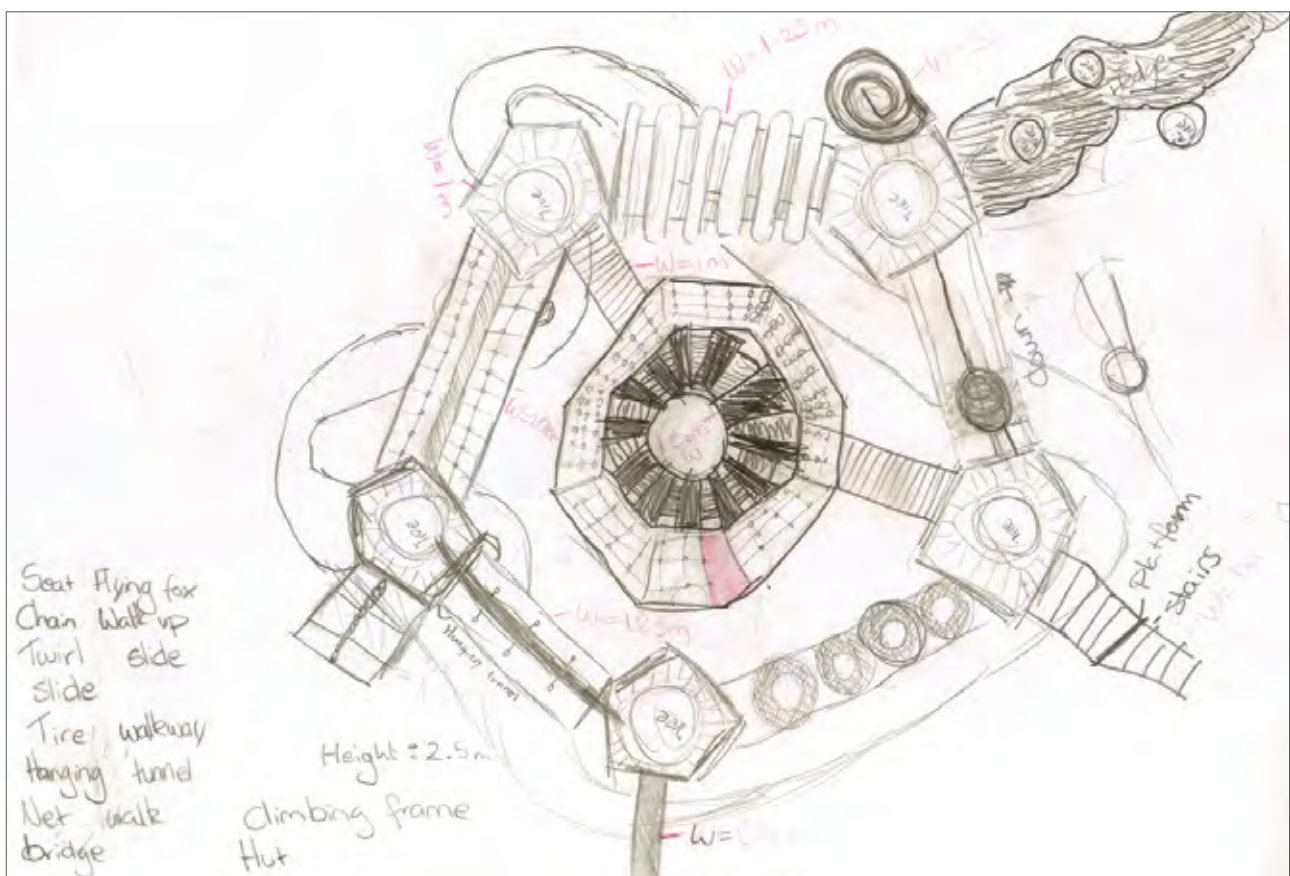
★ Hedges

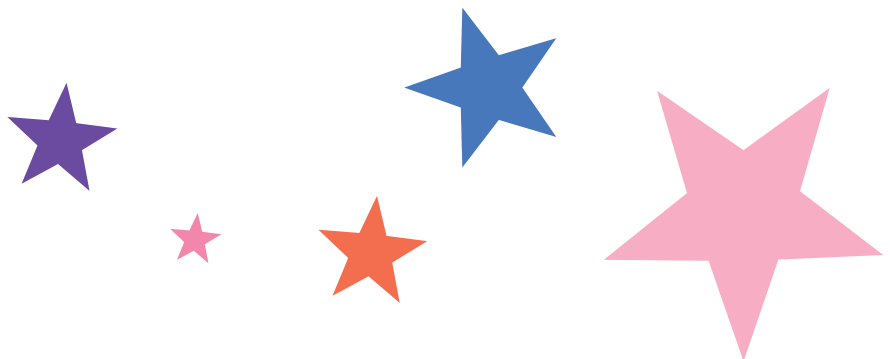
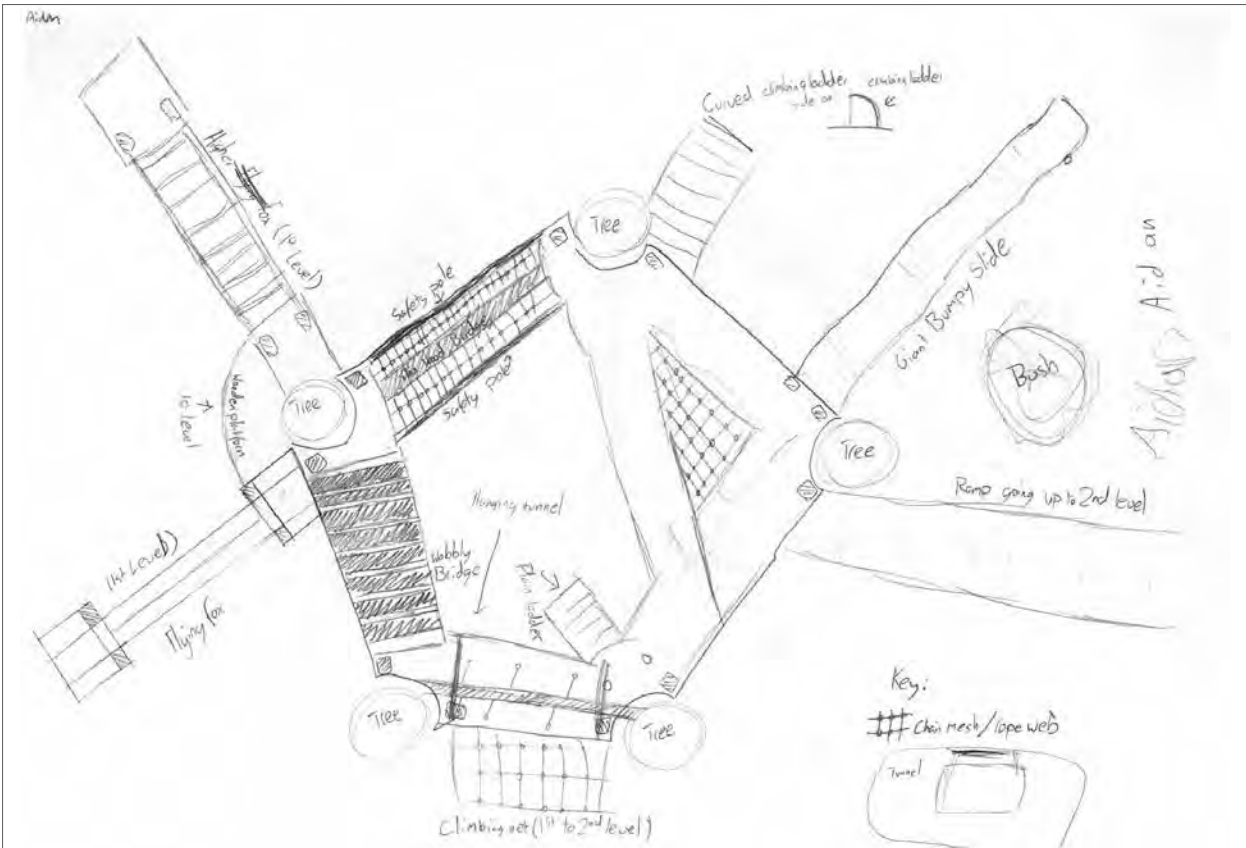
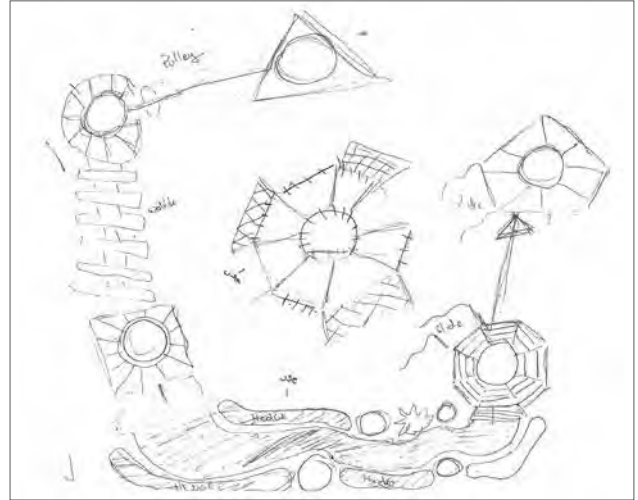
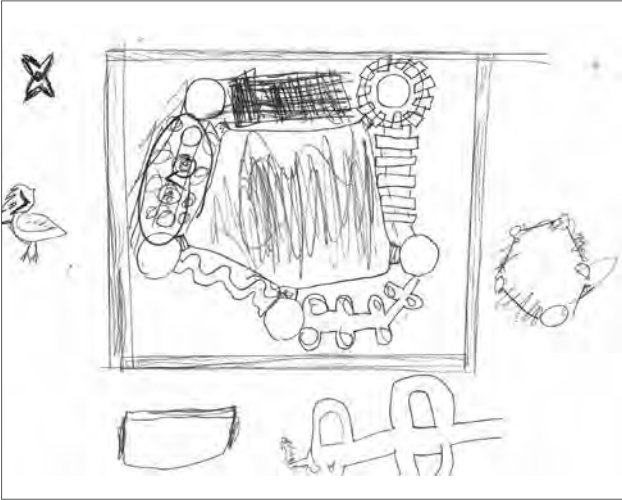
Concept design

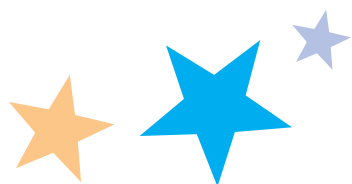
At this point, the children were given time to work on their own to develop a plan. As a group we had researched many kinds of playgrounds using the internet and there had been a lot of talking about what sort of structure they wanted and why. They now needed time to develop these concepts, so they could bring their ideas back to the group using another language – drawing.

From the survey, we deduced that the children at Princes Hill Primary School wanted double level playground and climbing equipment, quite like the old playground. After surveying the area that was roughly where the playground would be, we thought that because of the trees' positions it was possible to incorporate the trees in our playground.

We discussed how we could design the new playground. We then designed our own individual playground concept. It seemed everyone had incorporated the pentagon formation of trees in their playground.







Annual General Meeting presentation – Taking children seriously

The children were invited to speak to parents about their project at the school's Annual General Meeting on June 22, 2011. They decided what each person would say and spoke with confidence:

Patrick: Hello, we are the playground redevelopment committee. Ben, Aidan, Tessa, Rafi and Patrick. Kosta is also part of this group but he is in Greece at this time. We have been working with Pat, Shana and the architects Urban Initiatives on a master plan for redeveloping our school grounds.

Rafi: After meeting with a group of architects, teachers and parents we decided to compile a survey to gather information about people's opinions and thoughts on our existing playground and to find out what people wanted in a new playground. To inform people about this survey process, we presented at assembly and also put an article in *Talking Point* to ask parents for their suggestions.

Patrick: Unfortunately we did not get any feedback from parents, but the children's responses were overwhelming.

Ben: As a team we met to analyse the survey responses and we came up with a summary of the most popular requests. It was obvious that the children missed their old adventure playground and a lot of their ideas incorporated what they missed, such as tunnels and slides.

Tessa: They also wanted double volume equipment and connected spaces, which would allow for imaginative play as the children were able to move more freely from one space to another. We also noticed the children took interest in spaces which offered protection from the weather. We presented

these findings to Urban Initiatives who went away and have come back with this first draft proposal.

Aidan: We are currently designing our new adventure playground, which we have decided to place next to the 5/6 Neighbourhood Two portable. It incorporates all the concepts that kept on coming up in our survey results such as swinging, climbing, hiding, chasing, jumping, hanging and spinning. This is only at the concept stage and we are hoping our ideas will become reality.

Patrick: It is still not too late to contribute your ideas. We have set up a documentation wall in the library for your comments. I will now hand you over to Judy McKinty who will say a few words.

Discussing the proposed landscape plan



Following the AGM, the children reflected on their presentation:

Ben: When we were called up to talk I felt good about it and we talked smoothly without any stutters. That made me feel better yet! As we handed over to the next playground speaker, Judy McKinty, I felt we were really making some people think...Judy had spent time researching us, so she knows what we wanted, even those things that aren't exactly in the boundary of the school rules. Having an older person who knows about that is absolutely amazing!

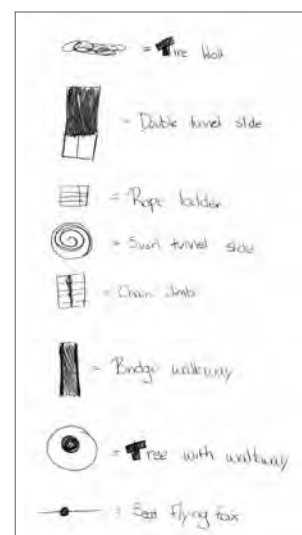
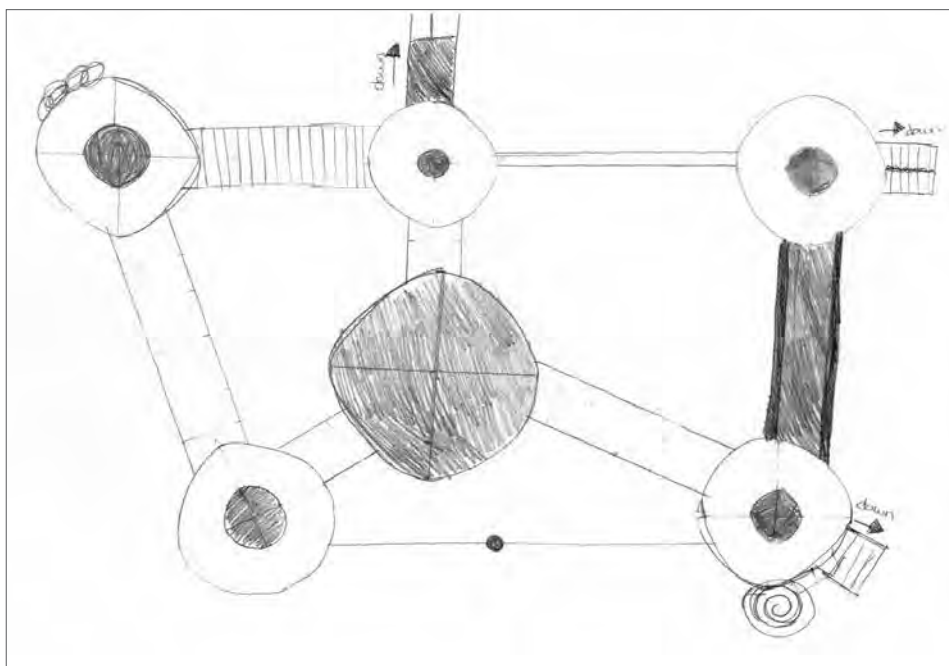
Rafi: Our presentation went exceptionally well and I felt that the parents approved our ideas on the new playground. We had great feedback and it felt

great to stand up on stage as the student body of the school for this redevelopment project. I really thought we got our message across and our speech was well written. The parents understood that it was a big job to get up there and present our ideas and findings. I hope our school community helps us proceed with this project...

Patrick: It felt exhilarating to be able to show the school community what we have been working on this semester. Seeing the people looking interested felt really motivating and then to hear from Judy McKinty was just a fantastic ending to the night... She showed us that there is some great imaginative play going on in the playground. I hope we will be able to proceed with our project and later our ideas may become reality.

The final design

After discussing the main points of each individual design we decided to combine the best elements of each design into a single concept. This was done by looking at each design, and then everyone gave a signature idea and collaborated to create a final design that included everyone's individual ideas.



Key to symbols used in the design



Working with parents – Lending each other skills

At the AGM, a parent expressed her desire to share her skills with the children. Matilde is an architect and offered to come in to show the children how to make a professional model of their playground. The group had already decided that this was how they wanted to communicate their ideas, as they realised that the 2-D drawings they had done were very limiting in their ability to explain multiple levels and heights of the equipment.

We were very grateful that Mum wanted to give up her time to share her experience with us. We found her knowledge very useful in our quest to complete our new model playground. She showed us the importance of a good strong base and choosing the right materials. She helped us choose a scale and construct the 5/6 N1 portable to scale. – Rafi



The environment as teacher – Inspiration



Mathilde had left us with images and examples we could consider using for our own model. We constructed an inspiration board and set up an area in the classroom to support our work. This was also an inspiration to other children in the neighbourhood, and we began to see model-making as a language used to express ideas in a creativity project which was taking place in the neighbourhood at the same time.





Planning

Each session we would come together and plan what we needed to do and what each of us would like to do. Although individually we made things, what we were making was always decided upon by the group.

August, 6, 2011

- ① Put on new trees on good copy of drawing and on playground structure.
- ② Redo fence - Rafi/Tess
- ③ Decide on what materials we use for playground - how will we make it - Aiden/Patrick
- ④ Trees - Kosta/Ben Make look quite realistic not exact scale height
- ⑤ Draw where existing structures are placed - remeasure
- ⑥ Move existing flying fox

Notes from a planning meeting





The process of model-making

MEASUREMENT

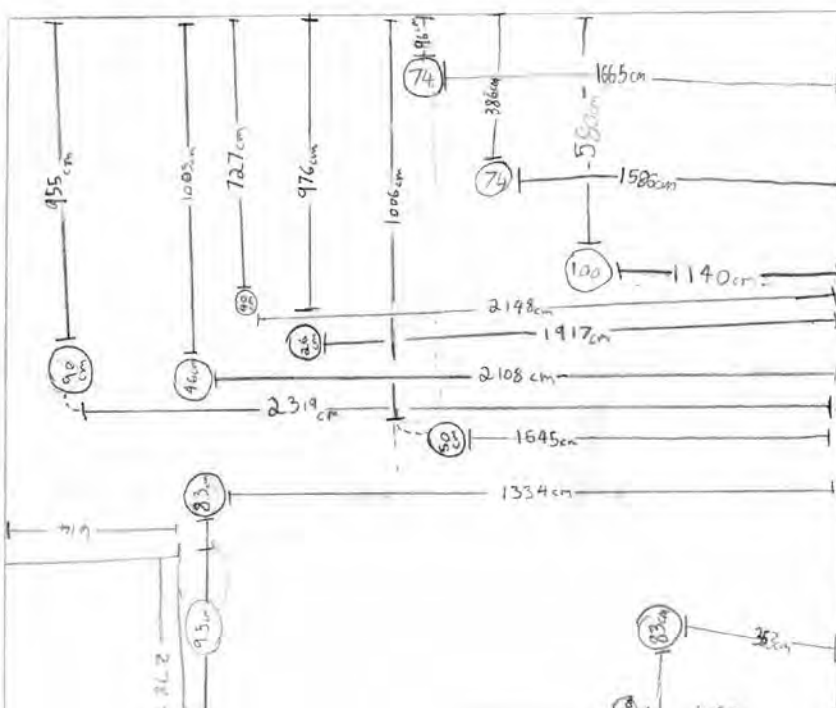
David: About half way through making the model I joined in. I joined in the measurement stage where we had to measure every tree in the area of the playground and find out the length from the fence line and measure it. It was challenging but fun because the measuring tape would only go so far, so we had to mark where it stopped then keep on measuring from there. Also another thing that happened was when we had one tree in the way of the other tree, which would cause other problems like trying to measure it from the side of the tree as well as trying to get it perfectly in-line. The last thing we had to do was get the circumference. But in the end it was a fun learning experience and worth it, seeing the playground finished.

Scaling was the hard part and not always a group project. While some were measuring trees, others were scaling the already-measured trees. The scale was 1:50, so 50cm in real life equated to 1cm in the model. There was always some scaling to do for all seven members, whether it was trees, people, fences, running track or area of tanbark. The way we went about figuring it out was to work out how many 50cm's were in the real life object, for example:

$$\begin{array}{l} 150\text{cm} = 3\text{cm} \\ (\text{real life}) \quad (\text{model}) \end{array}$$

We then had to work out the scale of the remainder, for example:

$$\begin{array}{l} 175\text{cm} = 3.5\text{cm} \\ (\text{real life}) \quad (\text{model}) \end{array}$$



“This is not ANY playground. It’s THE playground and we know it because the kids chose it.”

Determining the position of each tree



MEASURING CIRCUMFERENCE



A SOLID BASE

At the very beginning when we were thinking about what we wanted, Mathilde (Rafi's mum) volunteered to come in to help us. After all, her architectural skills really helped. She taught us to create a webbed solid base. First we chose a reasonable height for a base. We then made slots for the webbing and continued until it was fully webbed into small slots. We had to put the top on somehow so we hot glued it on with the help of some PVA. We placed the top sheet on and there... our solid base all ready to go.



LOCATING OURSELVES

To complete our model we needed to represent what the people would look like compared to the playground. We decided to make miniature figures of ourselves. We each measured our height and width then scaled them to 1:50 scale. We then used scale rulers to make the little people and cardboard as a stand.

Example: The average of our heights was around 1.5m so when scaled would make the little figure 3cm in scale model size.



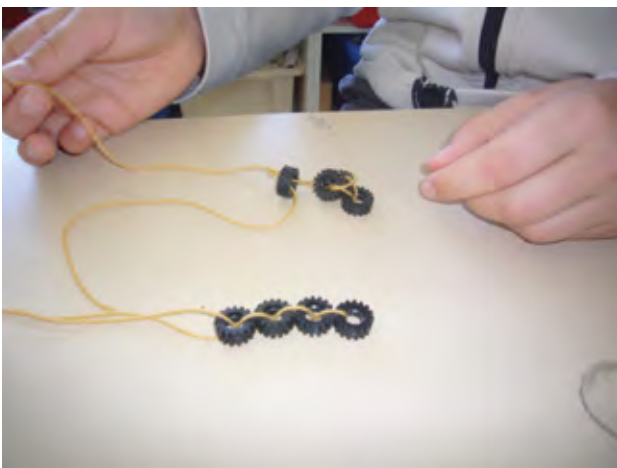
The process of model-making

SELECTING MATERIALS

Selecting the materials was very important. It took many trips to each part of the site to determine which material was the right one. Colour was also an important factor and we went to great lengths to find what we were looking for.

We wanted to make our model as realistic as possible, just like a miniature version of the real thing. Therefore, we had to make our playground equipment just as real. A great example of this is the tyre wall. We used string to mesh the tyres together so that it would be able to move a little, just like the real thing.

When we came to making the trees Mathilde had given us some ideas, but making the trees with cardboard and paper didn't look all that real so we each went off to find different materials we could use to make the trees. When we regrouped, each of our ideas was quite different but we chose Kosta's idea of making them with real branches. We thought this was the best idea because it showed the differences between the real trees (rough and smooth).





Safety

Throughout the project, the children were very aware of safety and continually assessed whether their designs were reasonable. We discussed this issue many times. Following are two examples of the group's discussions about safety and rules:

Patrick: Taking the chance out of something takes the fun out of it. If there is no risk, you're not unsure, then there is no reward....it's boring.

Rafi: We don't play to be safe. We play for fun – if it's safe or not.

Ben: The whole danger aspect is...we're not drawn to it (danger) because if someone told you that it was fun to look down the barrel of a gun, you would not do it. It's just that on playgrounds if every one has a rail or a bar you will be restricted by so many things.

Aidan: If there is a risk, kids are not going to do something incredibly dumb. If there is no risk then kids are going to seek out risk, to do something incredibly dumb.

Ben: If there is nothing to do, you're going to seek it out in other places.

Rafi: We understand that people are concerned, but they don't get it that we can be responsible and have fun with risks.

Ben: Whenever we are not in school we do absolutely everything that is restricted or banned in schools and yes, we get hurt...but we don't care.

Aidan: If there is a restriction then kids will find ways round the restriction.

Ben: The myth about kids breaking rules – it's not that. It's just that teachers ban what we like.

Aidan: Kids don't go out of their way to break rules – they go out of their way to have fun.

Rafi: You know how people say, 'My kid's grounded because they broke the rule'? There is no fun in getting in trouble, but we go out to have fun so if they break the rules then so be it...we go for it.

WHAT RULES ARE UNJUST?

No Running in Schools

'No running' restricts so many traditional games that kids have passed on throughout the ages. 'No running' means our culture and tradition is gone. To kids, running means enjoyment and it's a big part of fun. Parents worry so much about us that they have forgotten that we are responsible and look out for others.

I totally understand why teachers say I cannot move quickly around the classroom but there is no risk. The danger of running into something/tripping over is extremely low and a lot of the time games are only able to be played indoors. Teachers organise a game – say, Tiggy – and then say, 'No running, you might hurt yourself'.



No Climbing

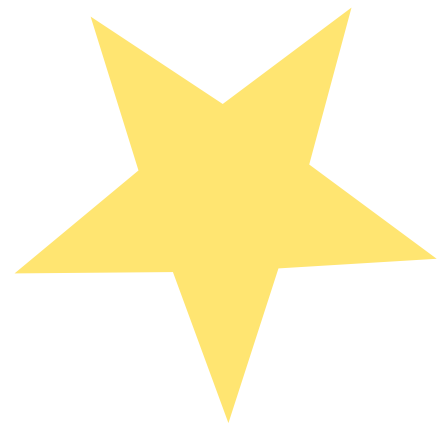
Kids enjoy being up high, unless they have a fear of heights, and it is the whole aspect of climbing up to get there that makes it fun. Yes, we can fall, but that's the risk that we want to take – a whole other level of enjoyment is risk.

Not allowed to climb trees because of falling off them is a stupid rule because kids like climbing stuff and being high.

No Card Trading Games

Not allowed to use Pokemon or other trading games because we can't settle arguments. How can we learn to?

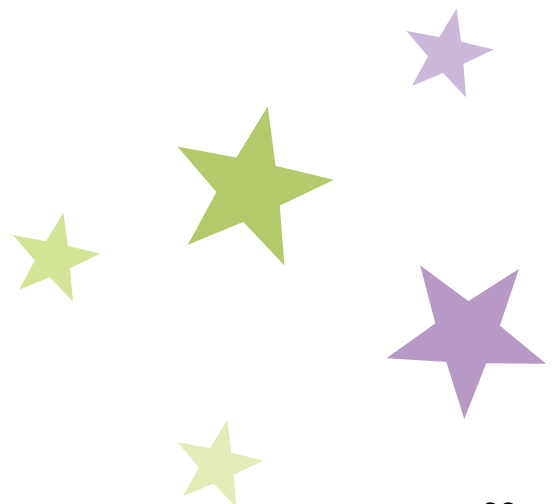
These conversations highlighted the complexity educators continually face – trusting children to act responsibly but also needing to ensure that we are fulfilling our duty-of-care responsibilities.





Presenting our thinking

We presented our playground design as part of the Grade 5/6 Creativity Expo. The expo was a presentation of all the Grade 5/6 students' learning in the fourth term. The whole school came through and looked at our work. There were lots of comments about our model. Lots of children thought it looked very exciting and fun, and liked how we had made a miniature 'world' of what it could look like. Later we also presented to some parents who were interested in what we had been doing this past year.





Presentation to School Council

The last challenge for the children was to present their ideas and their playground model to a meeting of the School Council and convince the members to support the building of the new senior adventure playground. Prior to the children writing what they were going to say to Council, I asked them to consider what they wanted to say and why.

Kosta: We have to make *them* want it and like it and really want to do it.

David: Not just want it for the kids.

Aidan: We've got to win them over.

Rafi: We've got to make them realise that the kids really want this. That's why we did the survey and asked the parents. Kids know what they want and parents know what their kids want. The whole point of this was for the kids, with the kids, and that's what we've done. It's not been an adult project because we've been doing it and making it.

Aidan: Everything we've built in the past hasn't really been what children want. It's been what teachers want.

Rafi: We want a replacement, not a substitute for the old playground. That's what they've given us.... a substitute.

Tessa: This is the first year children have ever had a say in what they want.

Patrick: We've got to not base it around criticism. Criticism is not going to persuade them. Criticism is not going to make them like us. We need to talk more about what we have to offer.

Aidan: We have to criticize them nicely.

Rafi: Instead of talking about the adults we need to talk about the kids because this is a school and it was built for the kids to learn, and play is a part of learning. We need to make them realise how important the kids are.



Site of the new adventure playground



Scale model of the new playground
Photographer: Tania Jovanovic

The presentation



This is the presentation the children made to School Council. Each colour represents a person:

Our current playground is a small stretch of equipment that was not built out of children's interest.

It is little more than a substitute for our former adventure playground.

The kids own their play and therefore have ownership in the playground.

A new playground should reflect on the children's play.

The area needs to have opportunities to invent new games; the current playground can only be used for its purpose.

We bring to you today an innovative way for the children to connect their play to their learning.

Our idea was formed from feedback from a survey we sent out many months ago.

The majority of children asked for an above-ground playground that incorporated much of the old playground's equipment, as well as some new ones.

We combined these ideas to create a rough sketch of our new playground.

The idea that the designers of the current playground failed to grasp was that we didn't want a substitute, we wanted a replacement.

What they didn't realise was that the importance of the right playground is equally as important as the class we were in or the school that we're at.

Play is a big part of learning for us and that hour and a half we have to play outside is a crucial part of our day and an even bigger part of our learning experience.

We then decided to think about the spaces we could use, and chose a pentagon of trees in a clearing, near the spot of our much-loved adventure playground.

Our new playground didn't just fit in the area; it fits around the trees, incorporating them into its design.

We could then put in all the equipment that came up most frequently in the surveys to make an amazing tree-top adventure.

This playground allows us to continue our creative play.

Because our play is not based around the equipment but the games and imaginative play the equipment allows us to do.

This is not ANY playground, it's THE playground and we know it because we chose it!





Reflections on the project



Photographer: Tania Jovanovic

It was clear that the project gave the children a powerful voice. They now saw themselves as strong, competent learners, able to construct knowledge and negotiate meaning:

Instead of talking about the adults we need to talk about the kids because this is a school and it was built for the kids to learn and play, and play is a part of learning. We need to make them realise how important the kids are.

The teachers had positioned themselves alongside the children, being open to the many possibilities and ideas that would emerge. I often wondered why this group worked so collaboratively together. Was it the small number of people involved? Was it the competence of the children chosen? Was it the group dynamic? I think that it may have

been a combination of all these factors, but more importantly it was about being able to truly listen, to engage the children with something they were passionate about and giving the learning a purpose: We've got to make them realise that the kids really want this. That's why we did the survey and asked the parents. Kids know what they want and parents know what their kids want. The whole point of this was for the kids, with the kids, and that's what we've done. It's not been an adult project because we've been doing it and making it.

What started off as a project about the redesign of a playground ended up as a project around the concepts of student voice, active citizenship and democracy.



Endnotes

Acknowledgement

All unattributed photographs were taken by the children of the Playground Redevelopment Group, apart from those of the children themselves which were taken by Shana Upiter.

¹ Esme Capp, Principal of Princes Hill Primary School. <http://www.phps.vic.edu.au/about-us/from-the-principal/>

² For a description of the children's use and significance of this structure see Judy McKinty, 'The "Cat & Mouse"', *Play and Folklore*, no 55, (April 2011), 24-26.

³ Judy McKinty, *Tradition and Change: a playground survey of Princes Hill Primary School*, (December 2010, unpublished), 15.

⁴ Ibid, 16-17.

⁵ A 'neighbourhood' at Princes Hill Primary School is a specially-designed learning environment, consisting of a number of teaching spaces and special-purpose rooms, including an art studio, a performing arts space, a science lab and other spaces, shared by two or three classes and their teachers.

⁶ *Talking Point* is the school's newsletter.

⁷ Extract from McKinty, *Tradition and Change*, op. cit., 18.

⁸ Building the Education Revolution (BER) involved the building of new infrastructure within Australian schools. It was a key element of the Australian Government's *Nation Building – Economic Stimulus Plan*. See <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/BuildingTheEducationRevolution/Pages/default.aspx>



