Schools must keep PLAYING

Dr Barbara Chancellor is a lecturer in the School of Education at RMIT University and recently completed a research study which investigates the play of children in Australian primary school playgrounds. Aspects of her research included issues associated with playground design, equipment and teacher supervision. However, her main focus was the children’s play.

Dr Chancellor’s teaching background is in both primary schools and early childhood settings and she is currently involved in promoting the importance of children’s play in a number of local and international forums.

Here are some excerpts and comments from Dr Chancellor about her research which is in both primary schools and early childhood settings and she is currently involved in promoting the importance of children’s play in a number of local and international forums.

“Many schools are providing playgrounds with a wide range of play possibilities through provision of high quality, diverse play spaces incorporating natural features.”

The over-organised and over-protected lives of children and the large numbers living in urban environments with limited access to safe outdoor play mean that opportunities for free outdoor play diminish or vanish altogether for many children. For children without backyards or access to local parks, their only chance to play together outside is likely to be at recess breaks in school. Consequently, schools today have an increasingly important role in facilitating play opportunities.

Dr Chancellor conducted an online survey of government primary schools in June 2011 in Victoria. This study aimed to investigate how individual school policy is impacting on playgrounds in the areas of play space design, play equipment, rules and supervision of children during recess breaks.

Data analysed in light of international and local research findings about children’s play indicate that many schools are providing playgrounds with a wide range of play possibilities through provision of high quality, diverse play spaces incorporating natural features. It also shows that playground rules reflect teacher attitudes and understandings about children’s play in the playground, demonstrating their belief in the need for surveillance and safety as paramount.

“When my room was focus on providing risk free play in the media that is critical of school policies and how they manage their playgrounds. I have felt strongly for a long time that many schools are doing great things but I needed some research to prove it. I found what I had been hoping for, and more, with lots of schools in Victoria providing inspiring playgrounds full of natural features.” says Dr Chancellor.

The next stage of this research to conduct case studies of schools, currently in the early stages, and identify what makes parts of the school playground unique. Dr Chancellor’s research will be a collaborative project between Dr Chancellor and Mr Brendan Hyndman, a published playground designer from RMIT University.

The 2011 study is now being implemented internationally and Dr Chancellor now aims to gain a larger picture of playgrounds. “We want to celebrate what is inspirational. School principals and teachers are doing amazing things in their playgrounds and their stories may be helpful to schools who are developing areas of their playgrounds.” Dr Chancellor said.

The new National Arboretum playground in Canberra

This unique playground is bringing interest and excitement to Canberra, and with very good reason. Features include climbing nets, cubbies that are a hub of acorns and discovery trails, all to the great delight of visiting children and their parents watching the smiles on their faces.

An interview with the playground designer Simone Bliss, a landscape designer with Taylor Cullity Lethlean, and Play Australia’s Barbara Champion, was featured on Radio National Bush Telegraph back in August. Here’s a snippet of how this playground is being discussed as setting a new benchmark for play spaces in Australia.

Simone Bliss describes where the idea for this design began. “There was a cork oak forest located there from 1917, I thought ‘let’s take that as a theme’ and imagined that the acorns that lay on the forest floor were catapulted up to another area of the site. We wanted to introduce another element of vegetation being the weird looking banksia cone. It was an area that would attract children and then they’d start to explore the broader arbo
terum and discover nature.”

Second to that we wanted to inject risk and challenge and imagination and spontaneously and make something we hadn’t seen anywhere else.”

Ms Bliss acknowledges a playground built in Canberra on a budget of $1.7 million, may not be feasible in smaller regional areas. Barbara Champion says playgrounds need to have some level of risk involved to be of real benefit to children.

“We’ve had a decade of focus on providing risk free activities for children and if you think about it, it’s a bit of non-sense. Yes they may be able to scrape their knee, or sprawl their ankle if they fall off a monkey bar, but the benefit to the child, in being able to use a monkey bar, far outweighs the possibility of a small injury. The tragedy today is that there are some children, who are unable to use a monkey bar from one side to the other! The research internationally and within Australia, overwhelmingly shows how disadvantaged children are, in many cases middle class and well to do children, who are cloistered away indoors. The research is showing that children’s abilities to manage risk, are dependant upon them having appropriate opportunities to play outside in unstructured environments as we did when we were children.”

WHAT’S COMING UP

PLAYGROUND PROFILE

The new National Arboretum playground in Canberra

Parks & Leisure Annual Conference

Date: 13-16 October 2013
Go to www.parksleisure.com.au/conference-information

Local Government Play Network in Eira

Murrumbeena Park Playspace, Community Safety in Public Parks, GESAC & Bailey Reserve Playspace Redevelopment

Date & time: 24 October 2013, 10am to 1.30pm
Location: Murrumbeena Park Pavilion, 28 Gerald St Murrumbeena, VIC 3163
Register online at www.playaustralia.org.au by Monday, 21 October 2013

Play Australia AGM

Special Guest Speaker – Robyn Monro Miller

Date & time: 31 October 2013, 7.30pm
Location: Kew Library, Cnr Gtham Road and Civic Drive, Kew
Register online at www.playaustralia.org.au by Monday, 28 October 2013

Local Government Play Network

Yarra Ranges (Local Gov. Members only)

Building playspaces on a light budget, getting best value. There is no cost for this session but please register your attendance.

Date & time: 13 November 2013, 10am to 1.30pm
Location: To be advised
Register online at www.playaustralia.org.au by Monday, 11 November 2013

Two Day Training Program in November

This program will provide details of proposed amendments and changes to the Standard AS/NZS 4422 and key details of all other Standards pertinent to playground management.

In particular AS/NZS 4422 which deals with ground surfacing, and AS/NZS 4486. Two key documents critical to effective playground management.

Date & time: 20 and 21 November 2013, 9am to 4pm
Location: Recreation House - Westerfolds Park Fitzgerald Lane, Templestowe, VIC 3106
Register online at www.playaustralia.org.au

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Play Australia Member News www.playaustralia.org.au

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www.playaustralia.org.au
The Next Steps for Article 31

Article 31 General Comment set to launch! By Robyn Monro Miller, Executive Director of Network of Community Activities, and Vice President of the International Play Association.

Hopefully by now you have heard the great news that on February 1, 2013 the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted General Comment #17 on article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). A summary of the General Comment has been compiled by the International Play Association and is available for downloading from the Play Australia website.

Article 31 covers the rights of all children to participate in play and recreation activities, have time for rest and leisure, and to participate in arts and culture. The General Comment (GC) explains in depth the provisions of the article with a goal of enhancing the awareness of article 31 within NGOs and Government reports to the UN.

Feedback from members is vital and we encourage members to use the GC as a reference point in making decisions.

Since 2008 IPA has led an international group of co-signatories to the request for a GC and has been closely involved in its development. IPA is extremely proud to have been a part of this effort. IPA world will be hosting the international launch of the UN General Comment on article 31. This landmark event is being organised by the IPA (supported by the Bernad van Leer Foundation) on 30th September 2013.

The launch will take place in central Geneva, the symbolic home of the United Nations, with an address from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Robyn Monro Miller will be our guest speaker at the Play Australia AGM Thursday 31st October 2013

Message from the Executive Director, Barbara Champion

As we all emerge from winter hibernation it has been a very busy time in the play world! Since our last edition I have had some wonderful conversations with our members regarding our Discussion Paper from around the country and their enthusiasm to have Play Australia effectively operating nationally is overwhelming.

Feedback from members is vital and thanks to those of you who directly responded. Here are some of the key discussion points you raised as important to support the development of the national organisation.

- supporting the advocacy role of the organisation (State and Federal levels)
- roles to include advocacy on issues that impact on children’s play, building infrastructure to support play, and development of the play work sector
- partnership opportunities with like organisations
- suggestions for programs and services to further promote play and information sharing
- the stronger voice of a national organisation.

Please remain involved in this process! As a membership based organisation we need your participation and involvement. A copy of the FINAL REPORT can be found on the website.