Designing For Playfulness:
A Heuristic Exploration of Playfulness and Playground Design

by

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ABSTRACT

DESIGNING FOR PLAYFULNESS:
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Playfulness is an experience that emerges from the phenomenon of play. Contemporary play-design research focuses on children and is limited to a construct of play that emphasizes physical activity and physical literacy. This has resulted in play doctrine that perpetuates neoliberal ideals of productivity and idealized body types. This thesis explores playfulness in the play-design process through semi-structured interview with key-informant researchers, designers, planners, facilitators and regulators in the field of play-design, and provides creative considerations to aid designers in the development of more inclusive and playful spaces.

Key words: play, play-design, playground, inclusive design, landscape architecture
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to anyone who has ever been told that they are ‘too old to play’ and to the many playful people in my life who never hesitated to join me in spontaneous song in the studio, decorating the blackboards and sidewalks of our campus with silly chalk drawings, running through the Arboretum making bird calls, embarking on imaginary fantasy quests over beers, and giggling our way through art galleries. Never forget to play. Play always. Play for all.
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Mom and Dad, you are the reason I am here. None of this would have been possible without you. Thank you for all your unconditional love and support.
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I remember the swing set at my elementary school playground. I recall how my friends and I would vigorously pump our little legs and lean our bodies rhythmically – back and forth – trying with each oscillation to reach a higher amplitude. Sometimes I would lean so far back that I could watch the sky become the ground from my new upside-down perspective. We became braver and devised to jump from the swing in motion. When you swing forward with no intent of following the seat’s plane of oscillation, and your hands lose grasp of the chains, you experience that momentary feeling of being free from the force of gravity. It was exhilarating, and soon I found that I had to jump from higher and higher to obtain the same adrenaline rush. When jumping was no longer as thrill-inducing, flips became involved. This inevitably led to a few falls, some resulting in minor injuries, but that did not stop us from attempting our swinging acrobatics. The possibilities for challenge that the swing presented to me and the giddy feeling of delight when I successfully attempted a new feat are what I remember most of my childhood experiences on the playground.

I can’t quite recall when I became aware that I was too old for the playground. Perhaps it no longer offered the challenge I was looking for, and perhaps I had decided that the act of playing was too childish. There was most certainly peer pressure involved. I never forgot about playgrounds but my interactions with them changed. Now I look longingly at them from the side lines, but not too longingly – an adult not accompanied by a child at a playground is frowned upon. I try to steel moments on the playground when children are not around.

As a child, the lines between work and play weren’t always clear. After recess came more activities. More opportunities to flex my creative muscles and collaborate with my classmates. The older I became the more definitive the line between work and play became. Time spent working now had greater expectations for productivity and I felt increasing social pressures surrounding what my ‘productivity’ should look like. In retrospect this research and my work as a playground designer are small acts of defiance towards the societal pressures I have experienced, coupled with my fondness for playgrounds.
Playgrounds are a quintessential feature of school yards and parks across North America. Playgrounds are understood as being spaces intended for play. This provided the perfect structure through which to explore designing for playfulness. Playgrounds entered into the public realm in North America in the late 1800s as a means of removing children from the dangers of the streets where they once played (Frost, 1985). Since then playgrounds have been touted as a tool to provide children with the benefits of physical activity and personal so that they can grow into productive adults (Land & Danis, 2016). Play is an innate component of being human. It is a universally exhibited trait across cultures, genders, and ages and can manifest in many ways (Sicart et al., 2014). Play has been proven to be beneficial to an individual’s mental and physical health. It has the capacity to increase an individual’s creativity, cognitive ability and social skills, and it can act as tool for things such as community engagement and healthcare related purposes (Allender, Cowburn, & Foster, 2006).

The focus of conventional playground design research has been on child development and safety. Is playfulness a consideration in the design process? To answer this question, I consulted six key-informants who fulfill roles in the playground design process. My key-informants consisted of researchers, designers, planners, facilitators and regulators who are professionals in the play design process. I conducted semi-structured interviews with each key-informant in order to encourage personal accounts of experiences within the play-design process to emerge following the heuristic method of inquiry. I used this data to produce a narrative exploring current understandings and perceptions of play and playfulness within the design realm. Based on themes that emerged in the data and insights from my key informants I developed creative considerations (see Section 5.1) aimed at guiding those seeking to design more playful spaces.

Single-use spaces designated for play from playgrounds to baseball diamonds, can take up a lot of space. These spaces are intended to be utilized by a user base with very specific abilities. Furthermore, these spaces are often restricted to a certain user. As urban areas continue to grow and densify, the preservation and adaptability of spaces for play will become increasingly important. I believe that incorporating elements of playfulness into designed landscapes and creating better spaces for play can help cities achieve land use goals by reducing single use
spaces, creating more inclusive and vibrant spaces, and encouraging the development of healthy communities, bodies and minds. I hope that this research will serve as a steppingstone for future researchers and designers to challenge how we design playgrounds, to create new possibilities for what they can become, and to explore how we can design for playfulness beyond the boundaries of the playground.

The goal of this thesis is to establish if playfulness is a consideration in the play-design process. To achieve this goal, three research objectives were created:

1. Identify the current state of play-design
2. Explore current understandings and perceptions of play and playfulness within the design realm
3. Establish creative considerations (design recommendations)

Chapter 2 explores contemporary literature related to play-design: The Benefits of Play; the History of Play; Defining Play and Playfulness; and Types of Play. Chapter 3 details the methodology and methods used to achieve the research goal and objectives. Chapter 4 presents the results from the key-informant interviews as a narrative shaped by key themes that emerged during the interview process: Challenging Assumptions; Playfulness as Relating; Playfulness as Attitude; Playfulness as Experience; and The Design Process. This is followed by a discussion including Creative Considerations in chapter 5. Finally, this thesis is concluded in Chapter 6 with a summary of the results including research limitations and future considerations for designers and researchers.
2 LITERATURE REVIEW

“Play originated from boredom and deteriorated behavior, an outrageous speculation that may, after all be true of the writer and [their] thesis.” – Cordon M. Burghard, psychologist 1984.

(Cohen, 2006, p.5)

Journal articles for this review were chosen as a result of key word searches involving a combination of ‘play’ and ‘playfulness’ using Omni, Ontario’s online academic data base, and Google Scholar. Many of the articles were produced in fields relating to behavioral psychology. The first article of interest was Gwen Gordon (2014) *The Origins and Future of Playfulness*. I collected my sources from relevant citations in Gordons’s article. I repeated this snowball method with several other articles to find research that related most strongly to my efforts in defining playfulness and exploring the history of play.

2.1 THE BENEFITS OF PLAY

Gordon (2014) presents what she describes as the adaptive advantages of play: its necessity in the development of metacommunication, finding meaning in experience, emotional stability, flexibility in identity, creative expression, symbolic representation, the ability to form and communicate narratives, social bonding and collaboration. These skills are extremely impactful on an individual’s well-being and begin to develop at a very early stage (Gordon, 2014). Well-being is derived from one’s social, mental, and emotional health, and is often denoted as ‘happiness.’ Happy individuals, it turns out, tend to exhibit more playfulness. Happiness set point is the state that individuals return to after increased stressors such as trauma or excitement. A high happiness set point is a good indicator of chronic happiness. This has been found to be genetically influenced, however, the achievement of genetic potential is influenced by environmental factors (Gordon, 2014).
According to attachment theory the formation of an individual’s happiness set point – or inclination for playfulness – begins in the very early stages. How the child develops relations to the things around them – for example, their primary care giver – forms the basis for how they view their world. The ideal form of attachment is ‘secure attachment’ which develops when “a care giver remains consistently available, affectionate, and responsive, resulting in a more trusting and sociable child. Securely attached babies feel confident to explore the world. They display a balance of attachment and exploratory behaviours appropriate to the circumstances.” (Gordon, 2014, p. 241). How one develops a playful disposition based on attachment theory is by having positive play experiences, create positive relationships with curiosity and having the freedom to play without inhibition. Gordon (2014) emphasizes that secure attachment doesn’t guarantee a playful disposition; similarly, those who do not experience secure attachment as children can still gain a higher happiness set point later in life.

2.2 HISTORY OF PLAY

Today, the benefits of play to a child’s development and well-being is wildly acknowledged, but this has not always been the case. Historical philosophy has sought to explain play behavior treating it as a trait exhibited by children, such as offspring mimicking adult behavior so that they can ‘practice’ becoming better adults. French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau was one of the first to argue the importance of play for the proper educational development of young boys, stating that they should not be robbed of the joys of childhood by being denied the time to play freely. He included in his argument that play was also important to the adult man, allowing him to be removed from the pressures of work and reconnect with his true self (Cohen, 2006). This was a particularly enlightened statement for an era dominated by Victorian ideology which saw no value in time spent ‘idle’ (Cohen, 2006).

It was not until the early 1900s that the topic of play became of recognizable interest among scholars (Cohen, 2006). Playgrounds had become a common feature in school yards. Modeled after indoor gymnasiums, playgrounds consisted of tall metal climbing structures often accompanied by slides, swings, merry-go-rounds and see-saws. The origin of the playground in North America was a means of removing children from the dangers of the now automobile-
oriented streets, yet the rates of injury and hospitalization from playground accidents was increasingly high. Pressure mounted for governments to put safety measures in place resulting in the creation of the Playground Association of America and research into safety was increased (Frost, 1985).

Since their creation, playgrounds have been used as a tool to promote physical activity and personal development in children, and the vast majority of playground design research has been focused on safety. Today’s playgrounds consist of a space within a defined boundary containing equipment intended to elicit specific play behaviours. They serve as an invitation to play and are often governed by strict rules and societal norms (Sicart et al., 2014). Playgrounds are a common amenity in public parks and school yards. They are often recognized by a post-and-platform structure adorned with primary colours and existing within the confines of a fall safety surface.

2.3 DEFINING PLAY AND PLAYFULNESS

From the conflicting terminology used to describe play behaviour, to the classification of ‘play’ activities, identifying how people play and what counts as play is a contentious issue and scholars have yet to agree upon a concise empirical definition (Barnett, 1990; Gordon, 2014; Lockwood & O'Connor, 2016). According to Gordon (2014) the difficulty in isolating play as a discrete activity is due to the many forms that play can take. What can be agreed upon is that play is a fundamental component of the human experience. As stated by Sicart et al., in their work Play Matters, “to play is to be in the world. Playing is a form of understanding what surrounds us and who we are, and a way of engaging with others.” (2014, p.1). Conventional understandings of what counts as play fail to recognize the fluidity of play often settling for a colloquial understanding that places play within the boundaries of a pre-determined space such as a playground or a soccer field (Sicart et al., 2014)

One of the bigger problems with conventional understandings of play is its association with physical activity and leisure time. While physical activity can be one of the many benefits of play, not all play is physical activity and not all physical activity is play. Yet many play
narratives make the mistake of using these terms interchangeably. As a result, the way we design for play has been overshadowed by physical activity and productivity objectives (Cohen, 2006). Conventional understandings of what constitutes play is largely shaped by personal experiences of play and societal expectations of appropriate spaces and activities for play (Lockwood & O'Connor, 2016). Physical activity has certainly become the central focus of health and well-being narratives, but the problem with using play and physical activity interchangeably is that it can limit the perceived opportunities for play. Physical activity mandates, such as those put forth by municipalities, favour able bodies and perpetuate narratives of productivity and idealized body types (Land & Danis, 2016).

Allender, Cowburn and Frost define physical activity in their work *Understanding participation in sport and physical activity among children and adults: a review of quantitative studies*, as “any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that result in energy expenditure” (2006, p. 827). They begin by stating well acknowledged health benefits of physical activity such as aiding the user in combating obesity, chronic illness, and cardiovascular diseases which is also mentioned by Mota and Esculcas (2002) in their work *Leisure-Time Physical Activity Behavior: Structured and Unstructured Choices According to Sex, Age, and Level of Physical Activity*. Allender, Cowburn and Frost (2006) found that physical activity has healing components associated with it; allowing patients to reinterpret their ability after physical trauma and create support networks with other participants; they discovered that the most popular motivations for physical activity in older adults was the perceived reduction of the effects of aging and to increase social networks. These outcomes are analogous to the positive benefits of play.

While Allender, Cowburn and Frost (2006) focus on physical activity rather than play, they establish a connection between physical activity and leisure that is similar to the connection made by Mota and Esculcas (2002). The reason that this is important to understanding play is that both groups operate under the assumption that any time outside of working hours is leisure time. Barnett (2007) notes in her work, *The nature of playfulness in young adults*, that many studies have made the mistake of conceptualizing play as the opposite of work. Whether or not Allender, Cowburn and Frost (2006), and Mota and Esculcas (2002) are making the assumption
that play does not occur at work, or vice versa, it is interesting to note the obvious dichotomy they have established between activities and behaviours associated with work and those that are associated with leisure. The truth is that some play is a lot of work. Play is not necessarily fun or pleasurable all the time. Some of the reward that comes from certain types of play is derived from experiencing and overcoming challenge (Sicart et al., 2014).

Feezell (2010) presents five approaches to play: 1) play as behavior, 2) play as an attitude, 3) play as structure, play as a meaningful experience, and 5) play as an “ontologically distinctive phenomenon” (p. 147). He derives these approaches from the work of sports philosopher Bernard Suits. Suits makes three claims about play that he argues are widely agreed upon in the field of sports research: 1) Play is autotelic – meaning that the purpose of the activity is intrinsic; 2) ‘games’ do not constitute ‘play’ – for example playing games, or playing instruments are acts of performance – however, they may be enjoyable and offer a ‘playful’ experience for the player; 3) The concept of play is not served well by the imposition of boundaries (as cited in Feezell, 2010).

It is perhaps due to Suits third claim that Feezell (2010) offers his five approaches to play with accompanying critique: 1) When viewing play as a behaviour there are arguably some behaviors that are easy to identify as play. The problem with this approach is that this doesn’t hold true for all individuals. Some scholars have attempted to circumnavigate this argument by addressing play behaviour as being “with apparent purposelessness” (p.152), but this is dismissive of any intrinsic reasoning on the players behalf. 2) Play as an attitude is based on the “attitude of the player towards the activity” (p.152). If the player is intrinsically motivated, the activity may be determined as play; however, there can be many motivating factors involved in an individual’s decision to pursue a playful activity. How the individual responds emotionally to the activity can change whether the activity is play; at times a runner might feel like they are playing, while at other times they might feel that it is a lot of work. 3) Addressing play as a structure provides the opportunity to construct definitions under the many forms that play can take; however, this too can be problematic due to the “lack of form” that may be exhibited in genuine play. 4) Play as a
meaningful experience best captures the concept of ‘playfulness’ mentioned by the preceding scholars and is explained by Feezell as:

“the notion of play as meaningful experience, which unifies the different approaches to play as activity, attitude, and form, may be a derivative notion, dependent on an ontologically distinctive account of play that makes experiential accounts metaphorical rather than literal.”
(2010, p. 159)

This approach suggests that while play requires a certain attitude, play is more than just the players emotional state and is not subject to the boundaries of the perceived activity (Feezell, 2010). Therefore, one does not design play; rather, one designs the framework to provide the possibilities for play.

### 2.4 TYPES OF PLAY

Play design can be generalized into two categories; structured play and unstructured play (Mota & Esculcas, 2002). Structured play utilizes design infrastructure with an explicit intent such as a baseball diamond, volleyball court, ski hill, hockey rink, skateboard parks, laser tag facilities, even activities such as board games and gambling. In these spaces, participants are expected to follow a certain set of rules and develop a set of skills that are essential to their participation in the activity. Unstructured play is less restrictive of individual movement and participation, and encourages new possibilities for movement, interaction and imagination. Unstructured play is more conducive to intrinsic motivation – the performance of a pleasurable behaviour vs. extrinsic motivation – performing a task to avoid negative consequences or to gain an external reward (Brussoni et al., 2017). Unstructured play requires a diversity of affordances for play and a user willing to utilize their creativity and imagination to generate their own unique play experience. This type of play is often associated with ‘extreme free play’ (Land & Danis, 2016), ‘loose parts play’ or ‘adventure play’ (Sicart et al., 2014).

Loose parts play garners a great deal of controversy due to the perceived risk involved with unconventional play structures, irregular play surfaces and of course ‘loose parts’ that are
characteristic of this style of play design. In a society that stresses safety in the form of regulations and laws, loose parts play can be a tough sell to clients and parents. There is little evidence to support any claim that risky play is linked to higher likelihood of injury among children and the toted benefits of increase confidence, positive self-image, improved social skills and physical health arguably outweigh any potential scrapes and bruises (Brussoni et al., 2017).

Land and Danis (2016) in their research, *Movement/ing Provocations in Early Childhood Education*, explore the impacts ‘extreme free play’ which they term as “movements unencumbered by the scaffolding of familiar movementing materials” (p. 26). Extreme free play creates conditions that increase the potential for the player to gain more agency over their play experience by allowing the player to dictate the movements and interactions that occur in the space. These movements are sometimes encouraged through the introduction of loose parts play materials. In an ideal extreme free play scenario, the educator does not dictate movement; rather, they follow the movements initiated by the player and assist only at the player’s request (Land & Danis, 2016). This research raises questions of how much of what is conventionally recognized as play is a result of social conditioning rather than the intrinsic motivation of the child.

Based on the literature it is clear that play-design is heavily influenced by conventional understandings that conflate play with physical activity. Some researchers such as Feezell (2010), Gordon (2014) and Sicart et al. (2014) have attempted to solidify an understanding of play that is more attuned to the pluralities of play and playfulness as an intrinsically motivated experience unique to the player. While early childhood development research such as that of Land and Danis (2016) has been paving the way for understanding the impacts that physical and societal structures have on play in children, the literature has yet to establish this knowledge as commonplace in the design field.
3 METHODS

3.1 RESEARCH QUESTION AND OBJECTIVES

The research question:

Is playfulness a consideration in the play-design process?

The objectives:

1. Identify the current state of play-design
2. Explore current understandings and perceptions of play and playfulness within the design realm
3. Establish creative considerations (design recommendations)

3.2 OVERVIEW

Play is a multifaceted phenomenon with many expressions. As such, this research required a methodology that would allow for pluralities to emerge. Heuristic inquiry is a qualitative, phenomenologically aligned, exploratory, and holistic research method. This methodology encourages the exploration of relationships between one’s-self and others as a means of developing understandings of complex human experiences (Sultan 2019). I was able to explore my relationship with play and playfulness through a reflexive process of shared meaning-making with my co-researchers through the employment of this method. Co-researchers is the term used to refer to the individuals on my research team: my advisor, my committee member and my key-informants (Sultan 2019). My key-informants are experts who fulfill crucial roles in the play-design process and who fit within my selection criteria (see Section 3.3.3). I conducted a semi-structured interview with each key-informant in order to encourage personal accounts of experiences within the play-design process to emerge.

Heuristic inquiry is housed within the research framework of social constructivism. Social constructivism is the theory that knowledge is socially and culturally situated and created
through relating with others. This framework makes a series of ontological, epistemological, axiological, methodological, and rhetorical assumptions that I adapted from Sultan’s work, *Heuristic Inquiry: Researching Human Experience Holistically*, as outlined below:

1) My beliefs and values are culturally situated and influence my concept of reality. The knowledge I have consulted for the purpose of my research was produced by individuals with their own unique concepts of reality that may not align with my own.

2) The knowledge that my co-researchers and I have produced is a result of shared meaning-making and does not exist independently of my research team. As such, the information presented in this document is not intended to be used to generalize or to establish universal truths.

3) My beliefs and values are inseparable from my pursuit of the topic. They shaped the questions that I asked and the meaning that I derived from the data. Being transparent about my positionality plays a key part to minimalize marginalization, misrepresentation, manipulation and exploitation of the data.

4) The procedures and processes that I employed result in qualitative data.

5) The information in this document is presented as a subjective account of my understandings and interpretations of the data that my research team and I produced. The narrative and the language I have employed is intended for audiences in the field of design research.

### 3.3 PROCEDURES

The following outlines the procedures that I employed to achieve the three objectives of this research.

**Objective 1: Identify the current state of play-design**

(a) Conduct *secondary data analysis* using scholarly sources collected through the Primo database to (i) outline the history of playground design, (ii) examine the social implications of contemporary playground design, and (ii) examine interpretations of play and playfulness within these sources.
Objective 2: Explore current understandings and perceptions of play and playfulness within the design realm

(b) Develop a script for semi-structured key informant interviews and (c) participant selection criteria. (d) Conduct interviews with key-informants to (i) gain a personal account of their experience with playfulness and the play-design process, and (ii) as a means of generating a dialogue between the key-informant and myself.

Objective 3: Establish creative considerations

(e) Produce a document that will (i) highlight the use, or lack thereof, of playfulness in the play-design process, and (ii) provide a set of creative considerations that will be developed based on a synthesis of data collected from key informant interviews, secondary data analysis, and self-dialogue to aid designers in designing spaces for playfulness.

Sections 3.3.1- 3.35 detail the procedures that I employed for each of my three objectives.

3.3.1 Secondary Data Analysis

My secondary data analysis was conducted through an exploration of academic articles, design publications and websites. The key words: play, play-design, playground and playfulness were used to find contemporary academic and professional works that relate to the play-design process through Omni, Ontario’s online academic data base, and Google Scholar.

3.3.2 Semi-structured Key Informant Interviews

Conversation is a process of meaning-making; thoughts are shared, ideas are constructed, relations are formed, and realities are reframed. An interview is a formal conversation and is the preferred method for investigating the intangible qualities of complex human phenomenon because it affords the researcher the opportunity to empathize with those who have experienced it (Hay, 2010; Sultan, 2019). The purpose of using a semi-structured interview is to allow for a cohesive narrative to form through comparing key-informant responses (Hay, 2010). This was accomplished by creating a script of open-ended questions that were intended to prompt key-informants to share their experiences with playfulness and the play-design process (see Section
3.3.2.1). Background information was also collected from the key-informants to better illustrate their positionality within the play-design process.

The interview questions were developed to initiate dialogue between myself, as the researcher, and my key-informants, as co-researchers, as per the heuristic method that I employed. The questions were structured to result in reflexive responses from my co-researchers, drawing on their personal experiences with playfulness and play-design.

3.3.2.1 Script

*Background information* – was collected prior to the interview and then confirmed/ edited/ completed by the participant during the beginning of the interview. This information included:

a. Title  
b. Position  
c. Company/ organization  
d. Years in current position  
e. Years involved in play-design  
f. Qualification  
g. Specialty/ areas of interest

*Semi-structured Questions*

1) What does playfulness mean to you?  
2) What is your [design*] process?  
   a. Does playfulness factor into your process?  
3) Do you agree with the following definition of playfulness? *Playfulness is the experience of being intrinsically motivated and uninhibited, supported through spontaneous fun-seeking behaviours.*

**
* This term was adjusted to correspond with the actor class for each participants current role, such as researcher – research, designer – design, supplier – supply, regulator – regulation, facilitator – facilitation.

** This definition is adapted from Feezell (2017) defining play as a meaningful experience (see Section 2.3)

### 3.3.3 Participant Selection Criteria

Participants consisted of key informants who play an active role in the play-design process and who were willing to participate in a semi-structured interview (see Section 3.3.3.1). The play-design process can involve many actors (see Section 3.3.3.2), such as landscape architects, city planners, safety inspectors, parks managers and most importantly the users. The following play-design process was adapted from Norman Booth (2011) *Foundations of Landscape Architecture: Integrating Form and Space Using the Language of Site Design*, the process is laid out step-by-step as:

- **project creation** – a client submits a request for services;
- **project acceptance** – the project is taken on, usually, by a designer;
- **project analysis** – ideally in this stage all of the factors are identified (see Section 3.3.3.3);
- **preliminary design** – the designer presents a concept that is then negotiated on amongst the actors;
- **master plan** – the agreed to concept is finalized for production/ implementation;
- **postconstruction evaluation** – safety inspectors are generally involved in this stage; however, researchers might be invested in this stage if they hope to gain insight as to how their theories translate to designed spaces.

Some of these stages may or may not be employed based on the scope of the project, nor do they necessarily follow a linear progression (Booth 2011).
3.3.3.1 Key Informant Selection Criteria

The following criteria was established for selecting key informants to participate in my research:

1) The participant must be a certified/ accredited actor in the play design process and be employed and/or currently holding a position that fits within one or more of the following actor classes: i, ii, iii, iv, and v.

2) The participant must be involved in the play design process of playgrounds.

3) The participant must have operated in their current position for (a) a minimum of two years OR (b) for a minimum of one year and must currently be/ have previously been involved in more than one of the following actor class: i, ii, iii, iv, and v, also for a minimum of one year.

4) The participant must operate, in their current position, within Canada.

3.3.3.2 Actor Class

In order to make sense of how these actors fit into the play-design process I established seven classes based on the play-design process that I adapted from Booth (2011): (i) Researcher, (ii) Designer, (iii) Supplier, (iv) Regulator, (v) Facilitator, (vi) Client, and (vii) User. The intent of the actor classes is to categorize the type of knowledge that the key-informant holds. Examples of roles that fit into the actor classes are as follows:

(i) Researcher – includes play researchers, play-design researchers, education researchers

(ii) Designer – includes play designers, architects and landscape architects

(iii) Supplier – include product suppliers, manufactures and fabricators

(iv) Regulator – includes safety inspectors, policy makers

(v) Facilitator – includes managers (i.e. parks managers), educators/ coaches/ day-care providers, funders

(vi) Client – includes the party requesting the project (i.e. municipality, school board, volunteer community association), this may also include any parties funding the project
Users – includes the intended users of the designed space (i.e. the players)

3.3.3.3 Factors

Factors are considerations that are evaluated in the play design process. These evaluative factors may include considerations such as safety, affordability, accessibility, inclusivity, site opportunities and constraints, user demographics, and playfulness.

3.3.4 Interview Protocol and Process

I gained access to my key-informants through contact information provided by my research team. Initial contact was made through an introductory email with an attached letter-of-intent (see Appendix 1). In summary, the letter states that the data is to be used only for the explicit purpose of the creation of my thesis document, that the interview is to take no more than one hour of the participants time, and that the participants identity will be kept confidential in the completed document. If the participant agreed to the interviewed, they could stop the interview at any time, and could request that their responses be withdrawn at any time.

If the key-informant agreed to the terms outlined in the letter-of-intent, a date and time was arranged to conduct the interview. The interviews could be held either in-person, or over-the-phone. In both scenarios the key informants were asked to provide their verbal consent to the audio recording of the interview. If the key informants provide verbal consent, the recording took place for the duration of the interview. The key informant was requested to state their full name and express their consent to the recording of the interview at the commencement of the recording. The key informant could request to stop the recording at any time during the interview. The recording was stopped at the completion of the interview.

If the key informant did not consent to the recording of the interview, notes were taken by hand in a designated notebook. My interview notes and recordings were shared only with my Advisor, Professor Sean Kelly. The notes and recordings were destroyed after the completion of my research (approximately May 31, 2020).
In-person interviews were recorded with the Samsung Voice Recorder app on my Samsung Galaxy S5 Neo smart phone. Over-the-phone interviews were recorded with the Cube Call Recorder ACR app. Handwritten notes were taken in a designated notebook in order to highlight items of interest and to make note of any follow-up questions that I wished to ask.

Upon completion of the writing of my thesis, I shared sections containing information that the key informant provided for their final review. My key informants were made aware that my completed thesis document would be posted on the University of Guelph’s publicly available digital scholarly resources platform, Atrium, as well as Library and Archives Canada’s digital repository. I also offered to provide them with a PDF copy at their request. My key informants were asked to direct any question they had about my research to myself or my Advisor via the phone numbers and email addresses provided.

### 3.3.5 Data Analysis

Data was extracted from the interviews through a series of processes. Firstly, audio recordings of the interviews were processed using an online transcription program called Otter.ai. I obtained a free limited-time subscription to Otter.ai which allowed me access to the program. I converted my audio recordings to M4A. files in order to upload them to Otter.ai’s online platform and initiated the transcription command. The transcription command, which takes approximately 60 minutes depending on the exact size of the M4A file, results in text which can be viewed and edited through the Otter.ai interface or exported for download as txt. file.

I opted to export a txt. file which I then copied into a Microsoft Word document. I saved each transcript as a separate Word Document. Secondly, I reviewed and edited each document to verify the transcription against the original audio recording. I listened to each audio recording a minimum of two times. This process was intended to ensure that the Otter.ai transcription program accurately recognized each word and that the context of what was said was accurately reflected within the narrative.
Thirdly, I used latent context analysis to identify themes within the transcripts. This involved making assumptions about the meaning underlying what was said by the key-informants (Hay, 2010). I achieved this through an analog process of printing out the completed transcripts and using colored pens to highlight related terms and topics. The transcripts were read through multiple times in order to capture as many emergent themes as possible. Lastly, unique points of consideration were extracted from the transcripts using the same analog method.

In order to maintain confidentiality of my key informants, I removed names and anything else that might identify them within the thesis document. This was achieved by assigning key-informants with unique numerical identifiers: KI-1, KI-2 and so forth. Specific occupational titles were replaced with generalized titles and descriptions of key-informant roles to maintain the context of their positionality. Locational information was also removed to maintain the confidentiality of my key-informants and any entities associated with them.

### 3.4 PROCESS

The following processes are part of the *seven processes of heuristic inquiry* identified by Sultan (2019). For the purposes of my work I identified four of those processes that I implemented through-out my research as a means of achieving a deeper understanding of my research topic:

*Self-dialogue* – an ongoing process of introspection where I reflected on how my relationship to the topic of play and playfulness evolved. I enacted this through journaling and voice recordings which I transcribed and elaborated on to create excerpts for this document. These excerpts are provided in the introduction and conclusion of this document.

*Tacit knowing* – the process of bringing awareness to implicit knowledge and embodied knowledge. Implicit knowledge is culturally bound and can be information we take for granted as ‘normal’ and ‘natural’. Embodied knowledge is a result of the data we subconsciously collect through basic sensory experiences. For example, embodied knowledge is how one distinguishes a human face from a non-human face, or a slide from
a chair. The relevance of tacit knowing will become clearer under the following section, 
*Intuition*.

*Intuition* – knowledge that the mind disseminates from tacit knowing which produces a ‘gut feeling’ – for example, when a guest lecturer states something that resonated with me, spurring a moment of introspection in which I felt I was able to relate to my research in a new way.

*Indwelling and Focusing* – the process of comprehending tacit, intuitive and explicit information. This involves questioning my relations to the research, how I arrived at my conclusions, and exploring new ways of understanding and interpreting my reality.
4 RESULTS

In order to achieve Objective 2: *explore current understandings and perceptions of play and playfulness within the design realm*, I interviewed six key informants to gain insight into their experience with playfulness and the play-design process. My key informants are experts in play-design who fit within my selection criteria. Each key-informant fulfills one or more of the following actor classes: (i) Researcher, (ii) Designer, (iii) Supplier, (iv) Regulator, (v) Facilitator (see Figure 4-1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Informant No.</th>
<th>Researcher (i)</th>
<th>Designer (ii)</th>
<th>Supplier (iii)</th>
<th>Regulator (iv)</th>
<th>Facilitator (v)</th>
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Figure 4-1: Actor Classes

KI-1 has been a Playground Designer and Play Researcher for five years. They work on a design team as a landscape architect at a Custom Playground Design and Build Firm where they
specialize in post-occupancy-evaluation research (i). They also work in concept design development and project management (ii). As well KI-1 is a researcher at a Canadian University pursuing a PhD in play related research (i).

KI-2 is the Vice President of Sales and the Regional Sales Manager at a Playground Supply Company where they have worked for 21 years. They have 35 years combined experience in the play-design process through their previous work at another playground supply company and three years of experience in playground construction and installation (iii). KI-2’s interest in the play design process began in University where they double majored with an Honours Bachelors of Outdoor Recreation and a Bachelors of Arts in Geography.

KI-3 is the founder of a Playground Inspection Company where they work as a playground inspector. They are CSA and CPSI certified and developed the CPSI certification training course on behalf of the Canada Parks and Recreation Association back in the early 2000’s. KI-3 is also a CPSI certification instructor (iv). KI-3 has also become the go to expert for European suppliers looking to sell their products in the United States and vice versa due to the fact that Canada works in both metric and Imperial, and KI-3’s fluency in the design regulations of both Canada, the United States and Europe. At the beginning of their career KI-3 worked for the family playground design company (iii).

KI-4 has two passions in life – one is cell culture and other is community building. KI-4 has a PhD in Molecular Reproduction and Development, and while they no longer work with cell cultures, they are still actively involved in research as an Innovation Designer for the Community Recreation Centre Innovation Project (i) (ii). KI-4’s involvement in play design began when they founded a grassroots soccer program in 2013 (v). Since then KI-4 co-created the Community Hub – a community social gathering space for all ages in their community and founded the Volunteer Community Park Design Project (vi). While KI-4 was the Executive Director for the Community Association board the municipality put an order in place to reduce the number of parks in their community. They set off on their mission to save their parks by founding the Volunteer Community Park Design Project and have also been consulting with other communities to help them start their own projects.
KI-5 is an Innovation Designer at the Community Recreation Centre Innovation Project where KI-4 works. Unlike most recreation centres the Community Recreation Centre also facilitates community design and play research (i) (ii). KI-5 develops ‘co-creation’ opportunities for the facilities patrons and designs unique play experiences based on their input (v). KI-5 has been involved in play research since 2016 when they began their pursuit of a Masters at a Canadian University (i). Previously they founded a Loose Parts Play Organization and worked as a volunteer with an organization that focuses on bringing play to disadvantaged children across the world (v).

KI-6 is a Project Manager and Landscape Architect with a municipality. KI-6 began their career in the early 2000s in Alaska where they first began working on civic projects. Since then their work has ranged from sustainable infrastructure projects, visual impact analysis, and land development for private firms in Canada and the United States. KI-6 honed their focus on public parks and civic spaces through their involvement with the municipality in a large-scale public arts infrastructure program. KI-6 has now worked for the municipality for seven years and has been part of the creation of some of city’s most popular parks and playgrounds (i) (v).

The following figure showed the key informants current titles and the entities they are employed by, how many years they have held their current position and their total number of years of experience being involved in the play-design process (see Figure 4-2).
Each of the key-informants was asked a series of questions during a one-hour semi-structured interview. The following responses were collected from each key-informant: their Background Information detailing the positions they have held, their total years of experience, and any specialties or areas of interest they wished to share; their response to Question 1: What does playfulness mean to you?; a summary of their response to Question 2: What is your design process?, and Question 2a: Does Playfulness factor into your process; and Question 3: Do you agree with the definition of playfulness? – Playfulness is the experience of being intrinsically motivated and uninhibited, supported through spontaneous fun-seeking behaviours. The following sections contain my synthesis of the data.
4.1 CHALLENGING ASSUMPTIONS

The playgrounds in many regards has become unanimous with conventional understandings of play. KI-1, the Playground Designer and Play Researcher, begins by addressing the issues of how play is conventionally understood in Western societies. The concept of the ‘pure child’ and play’s implications with productivity and physical activity are neoliberal ideas that are attached to play. According to KI-1 societal pressures to assign value based on productivity has driven the contemporary narrative of play. The touted benefits of play for proper cognitive, social and physical development in children are used as tools to produce productive adults. This stems from a conventional understanding of the development of young humans and “denies complexity to what childhood is”.

KI-1 does not agree with the definition of playfulness – as the experience of being intrinsically motivated and uninhibited, supported through spontaneous fun-seeking behaviors. They explain that their issues with the definition exist in the use of the words ‘fun’ and ‘fun-seeking’, “is that all children do? Fun-seek? … uninhibited and spontaneous, sort of get into the same thing… [children] are heavily inhibited by lots of things; what we (adults) do, what others do, what they learn, what they hear, what they read, what they see.” KI-1’s critique is not meant to diminish the benefits of play; rather it is a critique of the conventional focus of playground design. When we operate under a clinical assumption of play, there is an implication that tried-and-true ‘solutions’ exist.

The idea of playgrounds took off in North America in the early 1900s. What began as social infrastructure for the betterment of poor immigrant communities has not changed much aside from the introduction of the Canadian Safety Association (CSA) and CSA standards. A reoccurring constraint to playfulness in playground design, mentioned by all of the informants, are the CSA standards. Some key-informants believe that these standards have resulted in over-engineered play equipment. KI-2, the Vice President of Sales and Regional Sales Manager, explains that prior to CSA standards playgrounds were designed for bold and able-bodied children, often by landscape architects. These playgrounds usually consisted of very tall climbing structures made of metal installed on a hard surface or sand. Tall climbing structure, while
questionable from a safety perspective, offered anything but a sterile play experience in KI-2’s opinion. When KI-2 was working in playground construction and installation at the beginning of their carrier in the late 80’s, designers were pushing to build taller and more challenging playgrounds. In the late 90’s, when CSA standards were developed for playgrounds the most notable effect was the implementation of height restrictions. Playground structures became noticeably shorter and were now being installed on fall safety surfaces. According to KI-2, “the pendulum has swung very far in the opposite direction, to the point where everything is [now] overly safe”. Many firms at the time were no longer willing to take on the liability of designing playgrounds. They would still design the park, but they would opt for pre-fabricated equipment for the playground. This allows third party separation there-by reducing their liability and insurance costs. The market favored playground manufacturers who had the capacity to produce highly engineered and rigorously tested prefabricated equipment built with metal and plastic and coated in “kid-friendly” primary colours.

In the early 2000s KI-3, the Playground Inspector, developed the training course used in Canada to certify new playground inspectors. Playground inspectors are required by law to have a Canadian Playground Safety Inspection (CPSI) certification. The certification process requires a $500 course fee; there are no prerequisites required. This course is intended to enable the inspector to assess a piece of equipment using a set of tools that are based on the anthropometric sizes of an average child and general assumptions about how children respond to typical playground elements. “We know that kids like to enter openings feet first, as an example. And because their heads grow faster than their bodies, until about age of five, there is a fear that if a body gets through an opening the head may not.” If potential entrapment points on a playground are not wide enough to allow their head to pass through, the child could be at risk of strangulation. Most of the tools that the CPSI course provides are based on minimizing potential entrapment, impalement and falling risks. The tools were developed with research from safety acts such as the National Highway Traffic and Safety Act from the United States and their focus is purely on safety.
It is up to the playground inspector to judge what is “reasonably safe”, KI-3 provides the example of speed limits;

“the idea of a speed limit is to not drive too fast. But if we were to just say ‘don't drive too fast’, everybody has a different idea of what that is. We all know you can go 55 [in a 50 zone] and you're never going to get a ticket. So how fast can you go before you get a ticket? How risky can you make a playground before somebody says that it’s not safe... unfortunately, what ends up happening, in my opinion [is that] municipalities buy equipment that caters to the lowest common denominator and then playgrounds can be boring.”

Currently there are no laws in Canada that require CSA compliance other than provincially-licensed childcare centers. For municipalities and school boards their compliance with CSA is dependent on provincial regulations and insurance requirements. Without CSA compliance insurance can be hard to find and the insurance premiums are typically higher.

While playfulness is not a consideration in playground safety inspection, KI-3 believes that the CSA’s new Risk Benefits Assessment (RBA) will allow inspectors to consider the “playability” of a playground. An RBA allows the inspector to weight the risks involved with the design against its potential rewards. The CSA implemented the new RBA in 2020. It is closely modeled on the RBA used across Europe. European countries are typically known to have more progressive playground designs that incorporate higher levels of risk that we are used to seeing in Canada. New play structures that do not conform to the conventional post-and-deck style playgrounds, which the old standards are designed for, will be assessed using the new RBA. The question of acceptable levels of risk remains subjective. Opinions can vary from strong advocacy for risky play, to zero tolerance for injuries. For many scraped knees and other minor injuries are to be expected and could even be considered part of the learning process. KI-3 believes that a playground inspector must negotiate an acceptable level of risk while still maintaining the goals of the client.

4.1.1 Risk Aversion

KI-3 is part of the CSA committee that designs and evaluates the standards. The 30-member committee is composed of approximately 25% manufacturers interest, 25% regulatory interest,
25% user interest, and 25% general interest. 70% approval is required to pass a motion. A current debate the committee faces is usability versus safety for accessible swings. They have arrived at two options for restraining the user in the swing; a bar – much like you would find on a roller coaster – or a five-point harness. The issue with the bar is that there is a potential risk of claustrophobia, difficulty breathing and in a worst-case scenario, asphyxiation. The five-point harness, which is used in car seats, can cause strangulation when not used properly on a swing. The third option would be to have no restraints and risk the user falling out of the swing. It is up to the committee to decide which of the choices, if any, will be permissible under the standards. For some committee members all three options might seem like unfavourable choices. Some members might view one child falling as one child too many. Others want to be presented with a chart projecting how many children might fall before a threshold of allowable falls is surpassed. Acceptable risk is an opinion question and as KI-3 states, “you know what opinions are like, everybody has a different one.”

KI-2 is not convinced that children want sterile and safe playgrounds stating that the safety factor is largely driven by clients and parents. KI-4 wonders if we might be denying children the ability to attain the touted benefits of play if we provide play opportunities that are “too safe”. Allowing for risky play can help children learn how to evaluate risk, manage consequences, and exercise and challenge their abilities – experiences that KI-4 believes allow children to form and maintain playful attitudes and flexible thinking as adults. This concept is further discussed in section 4.3 Playfulness and an Attitude.

KI-1 mentions an example in which their son fell from a playground platform and hurt his knees.

“[he] came upon the reality of gravity, and the reality of flat surfaces, and what resulted in that. The pain the squealing the tears... the bits of skin that he left on that surface ... something had very physically materialized from that [experience] much more than just my worry.”

KI-1 clarified that they do not advocate for playground injuries rather they used this example to illustrate the importance that the experience had on their son’s new relationship to gravity. These concepts are discussed further in section 4.2 Playfulness as Relating.
An interesting point noted by both KI-1 and KI-4 is that many playgrounds are not in use all the
time bringing into question the purpose of the space when the intended user is not there. This a
common problem of single use spaces. Playgrounds that are designed to cater to only one type of
user, such as tot-lots, should ideally have amenities to support the facilitators who are attending
to the ‘tots’. These amenities should also function outside of their primary role to facilitate other
user groups. Whether it be something as simple as comfortable seating arranged to accommodate
small social gatherings, or more involved volunteer-led endeavours such as community gardens,
supporting infrastructure was identified by all key informants as enhancing the experience of
playfulness. These concepts are further explored in section 4.4 Playfulness as Experience.

4.2 PLAYFULNESS AS RELATING

There is a complexity to playfulness that is often ignored by conventional definitions.
Playfulness is multifaceted; settling on one agreed upon definition proved to be challenging.
What appeared repeatedly in the data was the concept of ‘relating’ or ‘meaning-making’. These
conversations ranged from relating to one’s self, to others, to the environment and to the more-
than-human. It was the dominant topic of conversation shared by both KI-1, KI-2, KI-4, KI-5
and KI-6.

According to KI-1, decentering the child from our narratives of play is a fundamental step in
designing spaces that are not only more playful but that are more inclusive, resilient, and
adaptable. “The more I am in these spaces,” KI-1 speaks of their experience conducting post-
occupancy evaluations of playgrounds, “the more I see that children are there for a limited time.
But the places still exist and what is happening in these spaces when the children are not on those
playgrounds? Is it really all about the child?” KI-1 suggests looking at the relations that can be
created in the space; who might those relations be between, and how might the design be
enhanced to increase the opportunities for relationships to form.

KI-1 shared a conversation they had with their daughter:

“[She] loves monkey bars... To her a good playground is a playground with
monkey bars. I [asked] ‘what is it about monkey bars?’ ... she said, ‘it’s
because when you’re on monkey bars, they hurt your hands. And then you have red hands. And then you can show [them] to your friends and say, look, I can do [the] monkey bars’. So, it's not about providing monkey bars so that this child can have upper body strength... It is about relating to some metal, and relating to being in the air, and then relating to others because now you get to tell a story about some effect that this has had on you... That's really what's happening here maybe much more.”

KI-2 discussed creating opportunities for what they call “peer-appreciation”. With the growing design trend of inclusive play, new playgrounds often offer more opportunities for everyone including elements that cater specifically to uniquely-abled children. “Autism and sensory disorders have really opened up a whole new avenue for play. And that peer appreciation piece is offering components and equipment that allow children of all abilities to play together,” explains KI-2. Many of the new inclusive design products on the market are ‘seamless’ in such a way that it is not overtly noticeable to the user that it has been designed for a unique ability. These new products aren’t prescriptive in the same way that the older post-and-deck structures are and are designed to require more creativity from the user. In part because they simply do not look like conventional playgrounds.

While working with a volunteer play program, KI-5, the Team Lead and Play Researcher, found themselves faced with a difficult challenge. They were tasked with designing a play experiences for disabled children in an impoverished government system. For some of these children more than just physical access was required; they had compounding disabilities and were non-communicative. This offered a unique challenge, which KI-5 and his team of volunteers overcame through tactile play. For many of these children it was their first experience playing in an environment designed specifically with their needs in mind. KI-5 experienced firsthand the difference that play can make in a child’s life. They describe play as a universal way of communicating.

Broadening our understanding of inclusivity is essential to further remove barriers to play. Accessibility for the facilitator is just as important as accessibility for the child. Creating a space that is habitable and accommodating of bodies with different needs is necessary, including such things as public bathroom facilities and accessible seating that offers the opportunity to be
sheltered from the sun or the wind. Similarly, passive participants should be given the opportunity to engage with active participants in the same space. This suggest offering accessible seating options closer to, or incorporated into the play structure rather than just on the periphery. Other considerations might be for those with guide animals, older children and teenagers, and elderly demographics. These considerations came up in multiple conversations with my key-informants. KI-4 emphasized that not every space is capable of perfectly incorporating each and every one of these considerations; rather every space should be given unique consideration.

Other boundaries to inclusive play are societal perceptions of who is and isn’t allowed on a playground. Some playgrounds even have signage notifying users that the playground is only intended for those under a certain age and that adults must be accompanied by an age appropriate user. While the presumed intents of this curious scenario is to protect children, such as sign would probably work to exclude the wrong people from the space. KI-1 stipulated that a child’s safety is first and for most but as to the sign, “does it really provide safety, or does it bring a kind of idea forward of who's the space is for and who has a right to be part of play…. what kind of messages that we are creating with this sort of invisible boundary?” And what sort of opportunities for relating might it be inadvertently discouraging?

4.3 PLAYFULNESS AS ATTITUDE

For KI-4 playfulness means finding and experiencing joy through the use of imagination, social connections, overcoming challenges and sometimes taking things “less seriously”. And it is certainly an attitude they bring into their design process. For example, playfulness is what brought their team to discovering some of the many solutions implemented in their Volunteer Community Park Design Project:

“[the] city won't let you put signs in parks... if it's a regional park, then they might put wayfinding signage in, but in what they call a community pocket park, they just don't let you put signs up. However, there is absolutely nothing to stop you from designing a wrap for a garbage can that has information on it. So it's all about using your imagination to find ways around the hurdles in your way”.
A playful attitude can be a powerful tool for creating social cohesion, KI-5 shared a story about a recent emergency COVID-19 meeting they had with their team and how providing the space to be silly helped to subdue team members’ fears and allowed them to focus on problem solving and generating creative ideas. KI-5 believes that problem solving is a big component of play in children. It is how they test out ideas and form deeper understandings of the world around them, “when [a child is] playing and having fun with an ideas, it creates these neurological network in the brain that allows for flexible thinking.” Conversely, we seem to lose some of this playfulness as adults raising the question, do adults retain their ability to think flexibly? “Play is often seen as something for kids, or even as a waste of time because people don't see it as work. I think we're seeing a growing trend that's moving towards allowing for play or creativeness into the workplace in more of a low stakes way.” KI-5 uses the example of companies such as Google who incorporate alternative and ‘playful’ workspaces into their offices. Google has also experimented with ‘playful’ work models such as their ‘freedom to fail’ model. It’s a model that rewards workers who take on risky projects and terminating them when they do not succeed. The idea behind this is that if workers are only rewarded for completed projects, they will be less willing to pursue more challenging ones (Teller, 2016).

4.4 PLAYFULNESS AS EXPERIENCE

All the key-informants agree that the experience of playfulness should be a bigger consideration in playground design and that it is often overshadowed by child development and safety aspects. KI-3 and KI-4 believe that perhaps we are focused far too much on the physical equipment rather than the experience of play itself. Many of the informants mentioned objectives that involved design based on how people ‘feel’ or with the intent of designing specific ‘sensation’ for the user. When I asked my key-informants about their experiences with playfulness, most of them recalled a time from their childhood or time spent with their own children exploring local wood lots and ravines.

For KI-2, nature play was something they experienced on weekends when they would make the trip out to the local conservation area, “boots and shoes would come off and [we] would roll up our pants and go play in the creek and get muddy. We would have a heck of a time… but that
whole element of natural play is lost on this generation of kids.” KI-4 recalls the forest outback of their childhood home; where they would climb trees and build forts, “It’s something you don’t see kids doing as much anymore.” It is perhaps this nostalgia for playing in the forests and creeks of our childhoods that has brought about the popularity of ‘natural’ playgrounds – play structures built with live edge wood, rocks and other ‘natural’ elements. KI-2 believes that natural playgrounds merely offer an illusion of the nature-play experience; in their mind natural playgrounds are the same conventional style playgrounds but built with wood instead of metal. KI-6, the Project Manager and Landscape Architect, believes that material appearance might be more important to adults than children. They see more adults interacting with the natural playgrounds than conventional post-and-deck style playgrounds. Perhaps this is because it is just as new and exciting an experience for them as it is for children.

KI-6 relates the experience of playfulness to a ‘spark’ of excitement that bursts into a moment of exploration or creativity. It is a universal experience that is not bound by age, upbringing or location. Whether or not one chooses to entertain their ‘spark’ is another issue. There are certainly spaces that are more conducive to this ‘spark’ than others. Creating a livable space where users can spend quality time is important to the play experience. Places of refuge and relaxation might be a key element in fostering the uninhibited aspects of playfulness.

KI-1 explains the considerations that go into their designs:

“I really liked this idea of complicated... not complicated the design process as it comes from the client point of view, but complicating our (the designers) thinking... I try to direct [my clients] away from this idea of catalogue shopping... so when [a client] comes and says this is what we want. Then the question is not how I can build this very thing for you. But rather, what is it about the [design] that works? What does it say to you? ... What is this culture that you're trying to create in your space?”

KI-4 is concerned with all of the factors, or ‘players’ as they prefer to call them. This includes the direct user, those who facilitate the experience and anything else that could potentially be affected by the design; from the client, to the neighbourhood, to the more-than-human players, to
the waste management strategy; seeing who plays in the space and what plays into that space is important to the effectiveness of the experience.

4.5 THE DESIGN PROCESS

4.5.1 Procurement/Design

KI-1’s work at the Custom Playground Design and Build Firm begins by assessing the client’s needs and their objectives for the design. This is followed by a concept development stage. Custom designs come with a custom price tag. There are generally a set number of hours allocated for concept development in the contract with the client. It is important to ensure that the product the client is receiving fits their vision; sometimes this means that the client will agree to amending the contract to allow more time for concept development if the parties believe that more time is required. While this is not an affordable option for some municipalities the danger of not involving some level of creative design thinking and resorting to what KI-1 describes as “catalog shopping” is that it can result in ‘cookie-cutter’ design. Every design situation warrants a unique response if the goal is to design playfully.

While their catalog provides some basic safe and simple conventional designs, KI-2 also offers what they consider to be the latest and greatest in play technology. KI-2 believes that their design team is equipped with the knowledge to make playfulness a serious consideration in their designs. The team participates in courses and workshops to keep up-to-date on the latest and greatest in terms of play philosophy and new products available on the market.

KI-2’s design team will sometimes provide two designs in their bid proposal, one that fits the exact prescription and another one that offers new play technology such as deckless structures and rope climbers. Some of these new products do not look like typical play structures and at a first glance might not be recognized as such. This aspect can be very playful as the user is not always presented with a prescribed way to interact with the structures. The structures are also designed to provide a greater range and depth of opportunities and challenges. KI-2 stated:

"They're far more playful in the sense that the child is filled with options and it's at their discretion to how they play. It's not necessarily the prescribed event"
going up this set of stairs, getting to a landing and going down a slide. And then lather, rinse, repeat until the child is bored.”

Despite the growing popularity of these new play technologies they do not always fit into the categories on the clients prescribed list and, more often than not, KI-2 finds their clients are opting for the cookie-cutter design.

According to KI-3, municipalities and schoolboards purchasing departments are generally under pressure to get the most that they can out of their budget which, in their opinion, leads to departments opting for the cheaper bid or the bid that can offer more items for the same price as the competitors. This can result in lower quality equipment and equipment that is based off older design technology that is potentially less relevant to the current play pedagogy and design trends.

Most of KI-2’s clients are municipalities, schools and daycare facilities. They also work with private enterprises such as campgrounds and theme parks, but the vast majority of their business is in the municipal market. There are typically two different processes: the maintenance side – facilitating the replacement and upgrading of municipal playgrounds, or the development side – providing playgrounds for new park sites and subdivisions. The company typically works alongside landscape architecture firms that have secured municipal bids. The firm will solicit a quote and then KI-2’s team will develop a design based on the firm’s budget, site area and theme with the prefabricated equipment that KI-2 supplies.

On the maintenance side, the municipality will typically put the project out to tender directly to the vendors. According to KI-2, in this situation the municipalities already have a strong idea of what type of playground they are looking for. The client may have a list of criteria with rigid parameters that will generally limit the design to the standard post-and-deck play structure. KI-2 suspects that it is the municipalities effort to maintain ‘fairness’ across subdivisions and to maintain transparency often with the unfortunate result of utilitarian and homogenous playground designs.

According to KI-2 some municipalities operate on a 10 to 15 year maintenance schedule. This means that the municipality replaces play structures once they are older than 10 to 15 years. It is
a significant sustainability issue considering that most of these structures are made entirely of metal and plastic that will end up in the landfill. Conversely these structures could be recycled or repurposed into new playgrounds and it would be a very cost intensive endeavour for a municipality to pursue. Re-purposed equipment would theoretically require structural assessments for each piece in order to ensure compliance with current CSA standards and in-order to obtain affordable insurance coverage.

KI-6 describes their process as striking a balance between meeting the needs of the community and providing the ‘nature’ experience. A successful design will attempt to layer elements that are intended to engage a diversity of users. Not only can this extend the use of the space to a larger demographic, but it can create a more livable space – space where users want to spend more time. Everyone’s experience of playfulness is different and successful parks will have many supporting elements intended to enhance these experiences. This is KI-6’s objective when redeveloping parks. Many of the parks requiring their attention have what they describe as a neglected feel; sun-bleached turf, minimal seating options, a monoculture of old conifers and perhaps a neglected tot-lot. These spaces do very little to incite creativity.

According to KI-6, designing a unique experience requires attention to details. Incorporating details that different people might notice, almost like Easter eggs in a video game, enhances the complexity of the space. Unique signage, craftsmanship, textural changes in pathway materials, features that influence movement and sound, and the layering of uses (e.g., active play and passive play) are important elements to what KI-6 considers a successful design. An objective across many of their park redevelopment projects has been to ‘soften edges’. Softening edges applies both to the physical edges, such as fences and other visual barriers that make the place feel segmented and potentially less safe, and invisible edges such as how spaces are separated by use or age. The goal is to create spaces that are inviting to a diversity of users where those engaging in passive play, for example, can do so alongside those engaging in active play. KI-6 believes that this can be achieved through something as simple as incorporating seating into the play space rather than around the peripheries.
4.5.2 Consultation/ Research

The Volunteer Community Park Design Project started off as the sole endeavour of KI-4. It is an entirely volunteer run community initiative to redevelop the community’s park spaces. KI-4’s mission began by devising a plan for the community parks that would result in lower maintenance costs for the municipality and that would provide greater agency to the community over their park spaces. In order to achieve this, they conducted site analyses of the parks to sample user frequencies and types of use and conducted community engagement sessions to gauge the needs and wants of the community members. “Most communities don't have big bucks. And that's the problem. We have landscape architects that can do all this [site analysis and community engagement]. But we also have communities that can't necessarily afford to pay landscape architects.”

During KI-4’s research they identified some key issues with the community’s existing parks. 1) that they catered to very few users or types of uses; predominantly what KI-4 describes as tot lots, all roughly the same equipment intended for the same user group – young children. The parks were not reflective of the diversity of its community members and KI-4 felt that the spaces could be more accommodating. Secondly, some parks were not being used. KI-4 was surprised by this finding considering that they conducted the study during the summer when one would suspect parks to be in high use. They hypothesized that this might be because most of the parks were quite boring in conjunction with the lack of wayfinding. Many of KI-4’s study participants were unaware of the existence of some of the parks. Some of the parks, which they define as ‘pocket parks’, are tiny green spaces tucked in between a cluster of houses on curvilinear street systems. Unless one has a view of the pocket park, they might never know it was there.

The Volunteer Community Park Design Project held ten community engagement sessions. KI-4 notes that ten sessions are an investment that municipalities can not afford but they wanted to ensure that the voices of as many community members as possible were heard. When they noticed that they were missing certain demographics they brought their community engagement sessions to the community seniors’ group and the middle schools so that they too could be involved. The volunteers on community projects such as this contributed their own time and
money to the project. In one instance children had the opportunity to contribute to a project though the co-creation of a park art wall. While some adults can not contribute time or money to these projects the involvement of their children helps foster more support. KI-4 theorizes that involvement of all ages might also help to reduce vandalism because all the community members are more likely to feel a greater sense of pride and ownership for the space. KI-6 has noticed a similar effect at their parks. They had a very high level of community engagement and public interest for one of their most recently developed playgrounds. They were aware that the park was a popular hangouts for teenagers, but unlike other spaces, KI-6 noticed that bottles and cans are not left around as much and that rates of vandalism are lower than in other parks.

Playfulness is a big part of KI-4’s community consultations. The way you approach co-creators, from the questions you ask to the way you collect the information, impacts your results. While child participants will often come up with the most creative (and unrealistic ideas) KI-4 attempts to distill them down to a feeling. In their experience it is rarely the piece of equipment that the participants are truly after; rather, it is the feeling they wish to achieve.

NIMBYism is something that KI-4 comes up against often during the consultation process. Sometimes it is households that are adjacent to the park who do not wish to see any improvements, or those who are worried about their property values changing, who fear increased noise, and who worry about the change of aesthetic. “If you try and please everybody, you're not going to please anybody. That’s community work in a nutshell.”

KI-6 speaks to the importance of territorial land acknowledgement and indigenous consultation. It is not often something that is considered in playground design, but KI-6 believes it is important for any civic project. The municipality has a separate department that works alongside KI-6 on their projects to help ensure that proper consultation processes are conducted. One of their current projects aims is to make the stories of the indigenous peoples and the pre-colonized land visible through artistic wayfinding elements which KI-6 admits can be difficult to do when colonial structures are so present both in the landscape and in the culture of the community.
4.5.3 Co-creation

The Community Recreation Centre Innovation Project operates out of the community’s recreation center. It might appear as a regular recreation center with the familiar amenities such as a fitness center, pool, sports courts, and day care, but it is also a research and innovation center. Patrons are provided with the opportunity to become what KI-5 calls ‘co-creators’ who are actively involved in the evolution of the community center’s programs and spaces. KI-5’s team develops and tests new ways of fostering community engagement and play through in-depth community consultation and participatory research. The intent of the project is, in part, to impact social policy that will influence the development of more responsive and resilient communities.

One example of how KI-4 and KI-5’s team engages with their co-creators is in the development of a health app. Rather than a traditional questionnaire, they asked the co-creators how they might go about building a sensor that would gather the users critical life information on a journey into outer space. The intention of this unconventional question was to shift the participants focus away from their preconceived notions of what a fitness app should look like and spark creativity. KI-5 provided an example of some of the interesting patterns that emerged:

“... maybe they want to know about how much oxygen is out there. Maybe they want to know how close to the nearest Reese's Pieces bar is... why are they wondering where the nearest Reese's Pieces bar is? Is it because they're hungry? Or is it because they're going to go into an anaphylactic shock if there's peanut butter around?”

With these results one might consider what a fitness app would look like if it were to provide daily air quality reports, if it had a mapping function that highlighted peanut free zones, or if it could tell the user when their blood sugar is low.

KI-5 notes that the challenge with co-creation comes from interpreting the data, or ‘synthesizing insights’ as they like to call it, and then incorporating the data into the design; this step is key. Some designers will attempt co-creation. They will invest in a consultation phase but if they do not follow through by implementing the vision of their participants then it is not co-creation.
4.5.4 Loose Parts Play

KI-4 and KI-5’s team at the Community Recreation Centre Innovation Project focus many of their designs on loose parts play. Which is a highly adaptable and affordable style of play space that can be implemented on a much lower budget than traditional playgrounds. Loose parts play is used to describe a play space that, unlike a conventional playground, does not require fixed-in-place infrastructure. Loose parts play is focused on exploratory and imagination-based play styles through the utilization of spare or salvaged items such as pieces of wood, lumber, vehicle tires, crates, tools – items that KI-4 says one might consider ‘junk’. They might also incorporate vegetation, sand, dirt, water or mud. The intent is for the user to interact with the play space however they choose. According to KI-4, some of their users are hesitant at first; despite the growing popularity of loose parts play, it is a relatively new experience for some users. Sometimes it becomes a process of re-learning how to play but according to KI-4, “once they realize there's no wrong way to play, and there's no ‘rules’ around it… they just embrace it with creativity… you can have the most fun you’ve ever had with very little in the way of expensive equipment.” Their decision to focus on loose parts play was influenced by the reported benefits that free play and risky play have on a child’s development. They wanted to put the focus of play on cognitive developmental and social development rather than pushing physical activity, “health and wellness is not just about physical health and wellness, it's about mental health and wellness, and a lot of that is based on creating communities.” Creating conditions that inspired people to be outside of their homes, conditions that encourage meaningful social interactions with neighbours and the natural environment. This suggests a unique approach to health and wellness mandates; perhaps healing and enhancing our relationships with community and nature will in turn result in more happy, healthy and playful individuals.
5 DISCUSSION

Three categories for conceptualizing playfulness emerged from the results; playfulness as relating, playfulness as attitude and playfulness as experience. This then resulted in three design objectives that I recommend for those who would like to incorporate playfulness into their designs: 1) increase possibilities for relating, 2) develop unique experiences, 3) approach design playfully (with a playful attitude).

5.1 CREATIVE CONSIDERATIONS

1) Increase possibilities for relating

Create possibilities for relating to self, to others, and to the more-than-human.

- Relating to self: Incorporate elements that allow for personal development, creativity and challenge.
- Relating to others: Create opportunities for users of all demographics to interact in positive and meaningful ways. Be aware of the social and cultural factors that impact the surrounding area. Decentering the child is an important step in creating inclusive paces. Consider all the actors who might be involved in the completed design: facilitators such as parents and teachers, older children and teenager, homeless and displaced peoples, maintenance staff, domesticated pets, and wildlife.
- Relating to the more-than-human: Explore opportunities for enhancing nature experiences. Provide opportunities for sensory exploration and hands-on activities such as those found in adventure play and loose parts play. Try to avoid designs that are too sterile, too structured, or too ‘clean’, and embrace nature’s ‘imperfections’.
- Provide opportunities for the community to gain agency of the space through consultation and co-creation opportunities, opportunities to impact and manipulate the designed space (for example: programable event space,
community gardens, volunteer led naturalization projects, art walls, loose parts play and adventure play, and moveable seating options)

2) Develop unique experiences

Think outside the (sand) box! Design beyond the perimeter of the fall safety surface. Supporting infrastructure and amenities are just as important as the playground itself.

- Create multifunctional spaces by layering uses and designing with diversity. This pertains to choices of materials, motifs, and plantings.
- Be conscious of your choice of materials, such as colour, texture and source of the materials. This can also impact how an individual relates to a space.
- Provide opportunities for users to experience fun and exciting sensations (for example: experiencing gravity, speed, concentration, heights, solitude, collaboration, and challenge).
- Challenge yourself to design experiences that cater to specific ‘unique’ abilities (for example: sight impairment); this can create a new experience for all park users.

3) Approach design playfully

Complicate your design thinking. Take moments to be less serious, to be silly and to allow for flexible thinking to occur.

- Consider all types of play that could occur in the space and how you might design new affordances to encourage play
- Be familiar with the CSA standards. Even if you aren’t designing a playground it is important to have a strong understanding of the standards so that you can creative safe play opportunities.
- Get the users, clients, and community involved through fun consultation and co-creation opportunities, such as KI-4 and KI-5’s outer space journey co-creator design scenario described above).
o Be an advocate. Contribute to the research and share your knowledge.
6 CONCLUSION

All key-informants agreed that playfulness should be a larger consideration in the play-design process and that it often loses priority to safety and aesthetics. Inflexible thinking about building and safety regulations, poor municipal spending practices and attempts to overstretch small budgets were also highlighted as factors that are responsible for less playful designs.

The business of play is expensive. If you want to create designs that break the mold you are more often than not looking at creating a custom design which inherently requires a larger budget. It helps to be part of a large design firm that has CSA certified staff on hand, and clients who are willing to incur the risk that accompanies designing something that is new. There is no law requiring CSA compliance, but non-compliance does come with greater potential legal risks. Playground design is still dominated by manufacturers. Firms that design parks will purchase prefabricated equipment from suppliers to provide third party liability; thus reducing the firm’s own liability and insurance costs. The prefabricated products currently on the market are highly engineered and rigorously tested. The trade-off with this equipment is that although it is relatively affordable and conforms very strictly to CSA guidelines it is not necessarily being designed with playfulness in mind.

Some municipalities will replace their playgrounds on a routine maintenance schedule every 10 to 15 years. These clients will, more often than not, opt for the most budget friendly bids which can result in lower quality construction, and cookie-cutter playground designs. The structures that are being replaced are sent to the landfill. It is an extremely wasteful practice and a poor use of municipal budgets.

When I asked the key informants what playfulness meant to them, they all recalled a time in their childhood or an experience with their own children where they were given the freedom to explore the woodlots and creeks down the block from their house. How they could spend hours immersing themselves in nature, playing imagination, building forts and climbing trees. They could spend the sort of time there that you could never get out of an unshaded playground in the middle of a turfed field. As one informant mentioned a playground, after a period of time,
becomes more of a meeting place, when the child has conquered the tallest slide, the playground becomes a place to meet friends and new and unintended ways of using the playground are explored.

Kids will play anywhere so why have playgrounds become so complicated? With so much emphasis on the play apparatus some playground designs negate elements that make the space more accommodating, or “livable”, such as wayfinding, comfortable seating, shade, washroom facilities and access to drinking water.

The importance of play has long been chalked up to the proper development of physical, social, and cognitive skills in children. But it is far more than that. Some of my key-informants would rather the focus of play be moved to that of stimulating creativity, inclusivity and peer appreciation. This involves giving agency to the child to pursue their own relationships with others and the world around them through less structured playground designs. This can be achieved by designing structure that are more accommodating of different play styles, creating opportunities for children to interact safely with their larger community through more age inclusive designs, and recognizing that physical activity is not a necessity of play.

6.1 LIMITATIONS

I am very appreciative of the time the key-informants spent sharing their knowledge and experiences with me. Many of our conversations could have easily lasted longer than an hour. There were many questions and areas of interest that I wish I could have taken into consideration in my research. The results of my data merely scratch the surface, and there is so much about designing for playfulness that has yet to explored.

One of the major constraints of my research has been my access to key-informants. Beginning in March, Canada was faced with the threat of a global pandemic. We all dove headfirst into contingency planning. As a result, some of the experts that I had hoped to interview were no longer available as they were working hard to ensure the health and safety of their family, friends, clients, employees and co-workers. When the threat of COVID-19 was actualized, the
topic of play was the last thing on my mind as I was faced with the new reality of social distancing protocols.

I saw playgrounds once teeming with children, now unattended and wrapped in yellow caution tape. Sometimes it felt that the colour and joy had drained from my cherished park spaces. Then something curious began to happen. I saw neighbours outside that I had never seen before. I now exchanged greetings with so many new faces on my afternoon walks, people who would normally be cooped up in an office building. Children were biking and walking and running with their parents, drawing on sidewalks with sidewalk chalk, and playing in their front yards. I saw adults drawing with sidewalk chalk too. Colourful hand-crafted ‘frontline-worker appreciation’ signs hung in the front room windows of neighbours houses. Social media was flooded with photos and videos of all the fun and funny ways that people have been processing our new shared reality. The playgrounds had closed but playfulness was still very present.

Indigenous consultation was only briefly addressed in my research (see Section: 4.5). I did not have enough knowledge to do this matter justice. I recognize that the imposition of western frameworks onto the land impacts our understanding and our relationship with the land and the beings we share it with. I also recognize that Indigenous consultation and the acknowledgement of territorial rights are key steps in reconciliation.

This research is focused on large municipalities, with the assumption that entities operating within these municipalities have the funds to invest in civic spaces and playgrounds. I would like to acknowledge that this is not a reality for all communities in Canada.

My research does not take into consideration any cultural differences that may exist in the understandings and expressions of play and playfulness. I am a Caucasian Canadian and explored this topic using a heuristic methodology that relies on my personal experiences and relationship to the research topic. The data I collected is presented as an exploration of a complex human phenomenon and the opinions expressed in my research are situationally bound.
6.2 FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

I analyzed my data while sheltering-in-place at my home in Alberta. While at a distance from my University it is incredible how easy it is to feel so close with access to communication technologies. It makes me wonder how these technologies might influence the playgrounds of tomorrow. What might a social distancing playground look like, or a virtual reality playground? When we accept that a playground is merely a piece of equipment, how might this influence our use of other equipment and technology in spaces designed for play? What does this mean for landscape architects?

Research has only just begun to look at the effectiveness of playgrounds regardless of what the intent of the design may be. This research addresses some of the potential barriers to designing for playfulness. Further research involving case study analysis could be valuable in providing a deeper understanding of these barriers. Going forward, as designers, we must to be willing to challenge the rules and regulations. We need to explore design solutions that rise above the perceived confinements of these rules and regulations that will offer safe, inclusive and playful experiences.

We must aim to design multifunctional spaces that can accommodate a diversity of users. We must operate as advocates and challenge users and clients to consider the full potential of these spaces. We must try to gain the support of communities by involving them in the design process and provide opportunities for the community to claim agency of these spaces.

We, as designers and researchers, need to educate ourselves and our clients so that we can all begin to think about play in a more holistic way. Are you ready to be playful in your approach to design?
REFERENCES


APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Letter of Intent

Dear [Name],

My name is Carly Balestra. I am a Masters of Landscape Architecture student at the University of Guelph. In order to complete the program, I am currently working on my thesis research for which I am investigating the concept of playfulness in the play-design process. My thesis advisor is Professor Sean Kelly.

I am seeking expert researchers, designers, planners, facilitators and regulators for interviews. I have identified you as fulfilling a key role in the process of playground design. I am writing to request an interview with you about your expertise, the concept of playfulness and playground design.

I would like to conduct a 1-hour interview either in person or via phone/skype sometime during the next five weeks (February 24th to March 20th). Below, for your information, I have outlined the purpose of my project, the interview protocol, and your rights as a research participant. If you wish, I can send the questions to you ahead of the interview.

Please let me know if you are interested in participating and we can find a mutually convenient time. Thank you for your time and consideration!

Carly Balestra
403-400-4455
balestru@uoguelph.ca
Research Summary

Playfulness is an experience that emerges from the phenomenon of play. Contemporary play-design research focuses on children and is limited to a construct of play that emphasizes physical activity and physical literacy. This has resulted in play doctrine that perpetuates neoliberal ideals of productivity and idealized body types. Is playfulness a consideration in the play-design process? My research explores playfulness in the play-design process through semi-structured interviews with expert researchers, designers, planners, facilitators, and regulators in the field of play-design, and provides creative considerations to aid designers in the development of more inclusive and playful spaces. The objectives for this research are to 1) identify the current state of play-design; 2) explore current understandings and perceptions of play and playfulness within the design realm; and 3) establish creative considerations (design recommendations).

Interview Protocol

The purpose of this interview is to collect data to be used for my thesis research. The interview will take no more than one hour of your time.

If you agree to be interviewed, you can stop the interview at any time, and you can ask that your answers be withdrawn at any time. I will not record your name or anything that might identify you within the thesis document; your identity will be kept confidential. Please feel free to ask any questions that you might have prior to or during the interview.

Upon completion of the writing of my thesis, I will share any sections with you that contain the information you have provided, for your final review.

My interview notes will be shared only with my Advisor, Professor Sean Kelly. These notes will be shredded once I have completed the study (approximately May 31, 2020).

At the beginning of the interview I will ask for your permission to have the interview audio recorded. If you provide verbal consent, the recording will take place for the duration of the interview. The recording will be stopped at the completion of the interview. The recording can be stopped, at your request, at any time during the interview. The recording will only be shared with my Advisor, Sean Kelly. The recording will be destroyed once I have completed the study (approximately May 31, 2020).
My completed thesis document will be posted on the University of Guelph's publicly available digital scholarly resources platform, Atrium, as well as Library and Archives Canada's digital repository. I would also like to provide you with a PDF copy, if you wish.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me; you may also contact Professor Sean Kelly at 519-824-4120 x56870 or at sean.kelly@uoguelph.ca.
## APPENDIX 2: Table of Key Themes from Key Informant Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Key Informant Interview Highlights</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access and Affordability</td>
<td>&quot;The cost of healthcare is a major concern for many of our community members. The lack of accessible and affordable healthcare options is a significant barrier to care.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>&quot;Improving communication between healthcare providers and patients is crucial. Clear and effective communication can lead to better patient outcomes.&quot;</td>
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<td>Community Empowerment</td>
<td>&quot;Increasing community engagement in healthcare decision-making processes is essential. Community members have valuable insights that can improve healthcare outcomes.&quot;</td>
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<td>Cultural Sensitivity</td>
<td>&quot;Cultural sensitivity and respect are critical in healthcare settings. Patients feel more comfortable and trust healthcare providers when they feel understood and respected.&quot;</td>
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<td>Education</td>
<td>&quot;Providing accurate and understandable health education is vital. Educational resources should be accessible to all, regardless of literacy level.&quot;</td>
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<td>Health Promotion</td>
<td>&quot;Promoting healthy lifestyles and behaviors is key to preventing disease and improving overall health. Health education and outreach programs can make a significant impact.&quot;</td>
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<td>Housing</td>
<td>&quot;Access to safe and affordable housing is a critical factor in health outcomes. Ensuring affordable housing options is essential to improving the health of our community.&quot;</td>
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<td>Income</td>
<td>&quot;Income is a significant factor in health outcomes. Access to healthcare services can be limited for individuals with lower incomes.&quot;</td>
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<td>Justice</td>
<td>&quot;Addressing disparities in healthcare access and outcomes is crucial. Ensuring equitable access to healthcare is a fundamental human right.&quot;</td>
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<td>Mental Health</td>
<td>&quot;Mental health services are often underutilized. There is a need for increased awareness and reduced stigma surrounding mental health issues.&quot;</td>
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<td>Physical Activity</td>
<td>&quot;Encouraging physical activity is important for overall health and well-being. Community programs and incentives can help promote a healthy lifestyle.&quot;</td>
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<td>Social Connection</td>
<td>&quot;Social isolation can have a significant impact on mental health and overall well-being. Building a sense of community and fostering social connections is crucial.&quot;</td>
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<td>Transportation</td>
<td>&quot;Access to transportation is essential for patients to access medical appointments and healthcare services.&quot;</td>
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**Table Note:**
- Columns represent different questions or categories.
- Rows show the responses to those questions or categories.

**Table Header:**
- Each column header contains the question or category it represents.
- Each row contains the response to the corresponding question or category.
APPENDIX 3: Key Informant Interview Summaries

KI-1: Playground Designer and Play Researcher

Background Information:

Position 1: Design Research and Concept Design Entity 1: Custom Playground Design and Build Firm, Years in position: 2

Position 2: PhD student research early childhood pedagogy, Entity 2: Canadian University, Years in position: 1

Position 3: Master of Landscape Architecture student researcher, Entity 3: Canadian University, Years in position: 2

Total years of experience: 5

Specialty/ areas of interest: pedagogy, holistic design

Question 1: What does playfulness mean to you?

KI-1 begins by addressing the issues with how play is conventionally understood in Western societies; they believe that play’s implications with productivity and physical activity denies complexity to what childhood is and are unfortunately highly entrenched ideas within our society born out of neoliberalism. KI-1 speak to the dangers of limiting our understandings of play to that of a tool for achieving personal development, or for “let out the energy” so that children will pay better attention.

“I tried to think of play in this idea of non-function. So, not linking play to health, not linking play to development, not linking play to fun or happiness.” KI-1 explains their definition of playfulness by breaking the term into two components, play, and full…“[Play] is really just a way of relating to the world. So then, if you take that further, playfulness to me [is full of] opportunities and possibilities for relating.”

Question 2: What is your design process?

KI-1’s work at the Custom Playground Design and Build Firm begins by assessing the client’s needs and what they hope to accomplish through the design. This is followed by a concept development stage. Custom designs come with a custom price tag. There generally a set number of hours allocated for concept design in the customers contract. KI-1 emphasizes the importance of customer consultations and site visits. It is important to ensure that the product the client is
receiving fits their vision, sometimes this means that the client will agree to amending to contract to allow more time for concept development.

“I really liked this idea of complicated… not complicated the design process as it comes from the client point of view, but complicating our thinking ... I try to direct [my clients] away from this idea of catalogue shopping … so when [a client] comes and says this is what we want. Then the question is not how I can build this very thing for you. But rather, what is it about the [design] that works? What does it say to you? … What is this culture that you're trying to create in your space.”

**Question 2a: Does Playfulness factor into your process**

“I guess if we define playfulness as this idea of creating opportunities for relating, then yes, absolutely.”

**Question 3: Do you agree with the definition of playfulness?**

KI-1 does not agree with playfulness – as the experience of being intrinsically motivated and uninhibited, supported through spontaneous fun-seeking behaviors, explaining that their issues with the definition exist in the use of the words ‘fun’ and ‘fun seeking’. They refer back to their statement about neoliberal constructs of childhood. Fun is often viewed as frivolous for an adult while at the same time considered a childhood right. Infantilization of play implies the innocence of the child and diminishes their agency over their experiences. “is that all children do? Fun seek? … uninhibited and spontaneous, sort of get into the same thing… [children] are heavily inhibited by lots of things; what we (adults) do, what others do, what they learn, what they hear, what they read, what they see.” This all harkens back to their statement about how our society denies the complexity of the child.

“Playfulness to me [is] something that is full of the possibility for play, that's how I would like to define it. And that leaves the opportunity to define play however you want.”

**KI-2: Vice President of Sales and Regional Sales Manager**

**Background Information:**

**Position 1:** Vice President of Sales and Regional Sales Manager **Entity 1:** Playground Supply Company, **Years in position:** 21

**Position 2:** Playground installation **Entity 2:** Playground Supply Company **Years in position:** 3
Total years of experience: 35

Specialty/ areas of interest: CPSI certified, HBOR  (honors bachelors of outdoor rec) + BA (geog).

Question 1: What does playfulness mean to you?

“I certainly think [play] should be a very social thing. In terms of creating friendships… I think there's a very significant element child development. And then I would suggest there's also an element of what I call peer appreciation… there has been a lot of movement toward inclusive play … and I really see the value in play for all so that we're providing opportunities for kids of all ages and abilities to effectively play.” “Autism and sensory disorders have really opened up a whole new avenue for play. And that peer appreciation pieces is offering components and equipment that allow children of all abilities to play together and not necessarily play segregated….The equipment that's on the market [now] is seamless, a child that is typically abled will not necessarily notice that there's anything different about the playground.”

Question 2: What is your supply process?

Most of KI-2’s clients are municipalities, schools and daycare facilities. There is also private enterprise such as campgrounds and theme parks, but the vast majority of their business is in the municipal market. There are typically two different processes; the maintenance side – facilitating the replacement and upgrading of municipal playgrounds, or the development side – providing playgrounds for new park sites and subdivisions. The company typically works alongside landscape architecture firms that have secured municipal bids. The firm will solicit a quote and then KI-2’s team will develop a design based on the firm’s budget, site area and theme with the prefabricated equipment that KI-2 supplies.

On the maintenance side, the municipality will typically put the project out to tender directly to the vendors. According to KI-2 in this situation the municipalities already have a strong idea of what type of playground they are looking for. The client may have a list of criteria with ridged parameters. KI-2’s team will then begin the process of working to win the bid. The bid that often wins is from the supplier who can provide the prescribed list at the lowest cost. The bid that often wins is from the supplier who can provide the prescribed list at the lowest cost.

Question 2a: Does Playfulness factor into your process

KI-2 believes that their design team is equipped with the knowledge to make playfulness a serious consideration in their designs. The team participates in courses and workshops to keep
them up to date on the latest and greatest in terms of play philosophy and new products available on the market.

KI-2’s design team will sometimes provide two designs in their bid proposal, one that fits the exact prescription and another design that offers new play technology such as deckless structures and rope climbers. Some of these new products don’t look like typical play structures and at a first glance might not be recognized as such. This aspect can be very playful as the user is not always presented with a prescribed way to interact with the structures. The structures are also designed to provide a greater range and depth of opportunities and challenges. KI-2 “they're far more playful in the sense that the child is filled with options and it's at their discretion to how they play. It's not necessarily the prescribed event going up this set of stairs, getting to a landing and going down a slide. And then lather, rinse, repeat until the child is bored.” Despite the growing popularity of these new play technologies they do not always fit into the categories on the clients prescribed list and, more often than not, KI-2 finds their clients opting for the cookie-cutter design.

**Question 3: Do you agree with the definition of playfulness?**

KI-2 agrees with the definition of playfulness – *as the experience of being intrinsically motivated and uninhibited, supported through spontaneous fun-seeking behaviors*, adding that they are not entirely convinced that children want ‘sterile’ and ‘safe’ play spaces and that ‘risk’ might be an important element to consider within the definition of playfulness.

**KI-3: Playground Inspector**

**Background Information:**

- **Position 1:** Founder and Playground Inspector **Entity 1:** Playground Inspection Company, **Years in position:** ~20
- **Position 2:** CPSI Certification Course Developer and Instructor, **Entity 2:** Private Contractor, **Years in position:** ~15
- **Position 3:** Playground Construction **Entity 3:** Playground Design Company, **Years in position:** ~10

**Total years of experience:** 30+

**Specialty/ areas of interest:** CSA and CPSI certified, expert in Canada, American and Europe playground design regulation
Question 1: What does playfulness mean to you?

As a safety inspector KI-3 feels that playfulness means nothing to them

Question 2: What is your process?

In the early 2000’s Canada Parks and Recreation Association approached KI-3 to develop a training course to certify playground inspectors. Playground inspectors in Canada are required to have this playground safety certification. The certification process requires that the individual pay the roughly $500 for the course and that the individual pass the course requirements, no prerequisites are required. This course is intended to give the inspector the tools to assess a piece of equipment using a set of tools that are based off of the anthropometric sizes of an average child and general assumptions about how children respond to typical playground elements. “we know kids like to enter openings feet first as an example. And because their heads grow faster than their bodies until about age five, there's a fear up till age five that a body gets through an opening in the head may not.” This would put the child at the risk of strangulation if potential entrapment points are not wide enough to allow their head to pass through. Most of the tools are based around minimizing potential entrapment, impalement and falling risks. The tools were developed with research from safety acts such as the National Highway Traffic and Safety Act from the United States and their focus is purely on safety.

It is up to the playground inspector to judge what is “reasonably safe”, KI-3 gives the example of speed limits, “the idea of a speed limit is to not drive too fast. But if it just said ‘don't drive too fast’, everybody has a different idea of what that is. We all know you can go 55 [in a 50 zone] and you're never going to get a ticket. So how fast can you go before you get a ticket? How risky can you make a playground before somebody says that it’s not safe… unfortunately, what ends up happening, in my opinion [is that] municipalities buy equipment that caters to the lowest common denominator and then playgrounds can be boring.” Currently there are no laws in Canada that require CSA compliance other than provincially licensed childcare centers. In a public park or as a school board their compliance with CSA is dependent on their insurance. Without CSA compliance insurance can be hard to find and the insurance premiums are typically higher.

Question 2a: Does Playfulness factor into your process

KI-3 states that playfulness is not a part of safety inspection. However, they do believe that the CSA’s new Risk Benefits Assessment (RBA) will allow more flexibility for playground inspectors to consider the “playability” when they are weight the risks involved with a design verses its potential rewards. The CSA implemented the new RBA in 2020. It is closely modeled
off the RBA used across Europe. European countries are typically known to have more forward-thinking playground designs that incorporate higher levels of risk that we are used to seeing in Canada. With the CSA’s RBA new play structures that do not conform to the conventional post-deck-style playgrounds, which the old standards are built for, will be assessed using this new tool. The question of acceptable levels of risk remains subjective. Opinions can vary from strong advocacy for risky play to zero tolerance for injuries. For many scrapped knees and other minor injuries are to be expected and could even be considered part of the learning process of play. KI-3 believes that what it will come down to is negotiating an acceptable level of risk while still maintaining the goals of the client.

Question 3: Do you agree with the definition of playfulness?

KI-3 agrees with the definition. They believe that there is often too much focus on the physical equipment rather than the experience.

KI-4: Design Innovator and Community Volunteer Project Founder

Background Information:

Position 1: Innovation Designer Entity 1: Community Recreation Centre Innovation Project, Years in position: 2

Position 2: Community Volunteer Project Founder, Entity 2: Volunteer Community Park Design Project, Years in position: 3

Total years of experience: 9


Question 1: What does playfulness mean to you?

For KI-4 playfulness means finding and experiencing joy through the use of imagination, social connection, overcoming challenges and sometimes taking things “less seriously”.

Question 2: What is your design process?

The volunteer Community Park Design Project started off as the sole endeavor of KI-4. While KI-4 was on the board of their Community Association the municipality put an order in place to
reduce the number of parks in their community. KI-4 set off on their mission to save their parks by devising a plan for the community parks that would result in lower maintenance costs for the municipality and that would provide greater agency to the community over their park spaces. In order to achieve this, they conducted ten community engagement sessions to gage the needs and wants of the community members and performed site analyses of the parks to sample user frequencies and types of use. “Most communities don't have big bucks. And that's the problem. We have landscape architects that can do all this [parks area plans and community engagement]. But we also have communities that can't necessarily afford to pay landscape architects.”

Ten community engagement sessions is a investment municipalities can’t afford, but KI-4’s team wanted to ensure that the voices of as many community members as possible were heard. When they noticed that they were missing certain demographics they brought their community engagement sessions to the community seniors’ group and the middle schools so that they too could be involved. The volunteers contributed their own time and money to starting up this project, KI-4 noted that while some families can’t contribute monetarily, when their child has the opportunity to contribute their art to the parks art wall for example, it helps to establish more support for the project. KI-4 theorizes that it might help to reduce vandalism as well because community members of all ages will feel a greater sense of pride and ownership over the space. They ended up engaging almost 2000 community members out of the roughly 17,000, which according to KI-4 is far more than the municipality is able to engage.

**Question 2a: Does Playfulness factor into your process**

Playfulness is a big part of the community consultations. The way you approach co-creators, from the questions you ask to the way you collect the information, impacts your results. While child participants will often come up with the most creative (and unrealistic ideas) KI-4 distills them down to a feeling stating that it is rarely the piece of equipment that the participants are truly after rather than a feeling they wish to achieve.

KI-4 also believes that playfulness is what brought their team to discovering some of the many solutions they have arrived at, “[the] city won't let you put signs in parks… if it's a regional park, then they might put wayfinding signage in, but in what they call a community pocket park, they just don't let you put signs in. However, there is absolutely nothing to stop you from designing a wrap for a garbage can that has information on it. So it's all about using your imagination to find ways round the hurdles in your way”.

**Question 3: Do you agree with the definition of playfulness?**

KI-4 agrees with the definition.
KI-5: Team Lead and Play Researcher

Background Information:

**Position 1:** Innovation Designer  
**Entity 1:** Community Recreation Centre Innovation Project,  
**Years in position:** 2

**Position 2:** Masters student researching risk and play  
**Entity 2:** Canadian University,  
**Years in position:** 3

**Total years of experience:** 7

**Specialty/areas of interest:** Co-founder of a Loose Parts Play Organization and worked as a volunteer with an organization that focuses on bringing play to disadvantaged children across the world.

**Question 1: What does playfulness mean to you?**

To KI-5 playfulness is an attitude that you can bring to any scenario and when used properly can be a powerful tool for creating social cohesion.

**Question 2: What is your design process?**

The Community Recreation Centre Innovation Project operates out of the community’s recreation center, which doesn’t operate like most recreation centers; along with having the familiar amenities such as a fitness center, pool, sports courts, and day care, it is also a research center. Patrons are provided with the opportunity to become what KI-5 calls ‘co-creators’ who are actively involved in the evolution of community centers programs and spaces. KI-5’s team develops and tests new ways of fostering community engagement and play through in-depth community consultation and participatory research. The intent of the project is, in part, to impact social policy that will influence the development of more responsive and resilient communities.

**Question 2a: Does Playfulness factor into your process**

Reflecting back on playfulness as an attitude that KI-5 feels strongly aligned with, they share a story about a recent emergency COVID-19 meeting they had with their team and how providing the space to be silly helped to subdue team members fears and allowed them to focus on problem solving and generating creative ideas. KI-5 believes that problem solving is a big component of play in children. It’s how they test out ideas and form deeper understandings of the world around them. “When [a child is] playing and having fun with an idea, it creates these neurological network in the brain that allows for flexible thinking,” KI-5 explains, this ability translates into
adulthood. Conversely, we seem to lose some of this playfulness as adults begging the question, do adults retain their ability to think flexibly? “Play is often seen as something for kids, or even as a waste of time because people don't see it as work. I think we're seeing a growing trend that's moving towards allowing for play or creativeness into the workplace in more of a low stakes way.”

**Question 3: Do you agree with the definition of playfulness?**

To KI-5 the importance of the definition lies in the flexibility of its interpretation while noting the added importance of social connection, “I think that if you're really experiencing playfulness, and if you're [playing] with other people around, you're letting them see that window into your soul… and it creates more of that [social] connection.”

**KI-6: Project Manager**

**Background Information: Project Manager and Landscape Architect**

**Position 1:** Project Manager and Landscape Architect  
**Entity 1:** Municipality,  
**Years in position:** 7

**Position 2:** Landscape Architect  
**Entity 2:** Multiple firms in Canada and the United States  
**Years in position:** ~13

**Total years of experience:** ~20

**Specialty/ areas of interest:** BLA

**Question 1: What does playfulness mean to you?**

To KI-6 playfulness is a feeling one achieves from an experience of exploration or creativity. They relate it to the idea of a spark, the instigating factor that can lead to the creation of something exciting.

**Question 2: What is your design process?**

KI-6 works on civic development projects. They describe their process as creating spaces balance the needs of the community, foster an appreciation of nature, providing spaces of refuge, and offer a range of opportunities for people to connect with nature and community. A key theme across many of their parks redevelopment projects has been to increase the opportunities provided by the space and to “soften edges”. KI-6 speaks to the importance of layering uses in a space, not only can this extend the use of the space to a larger demographic but it can create a
more “livable” space, afforded by transitions between different types of uses. “Softening edges” applies both to the physical edges such as fences and other visual barriers that make the place feel segmented and potentially less safe. It also applies to uses of the space as well; rather than segregating activities and age groups, creating spaces that are inviting to a diverse community so that participants can engage in passive play along side thought engaging in active play. This can be achieved through something as simple as incorporating seating into the play space rather than around the peripheries.

**Question 2a: Does Playfulness factor into your process**

KI-6 refers back their emphasis on details. When designing for everyone, incorporating details that different people might notice, almost like easter eggs in a video game. Unique signage, details in craftsmanship, textural changes in pathway materials, features that influence how you move through the space and where the eye focuses and methodical transitions between active play to passive play.

**Question 3: Do you agree with the definition of playfulness?**

KI-6 agrees with the definition. Again bringing it back to details as a vector or “spark” for encouraging playfulness.