Inclusive Playgrounds and Surrounding Environments: Strategies and Considerations

Mahmood, I. 1, Ross, T. 2, Arbour-Nicitopoulos, K. 2, 3, Bullung, R. 3

1. Faculty of Arts and Science, University of Toronto; 2. Bioview Research Institute, Holland Bioview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital; 3. Department of Geography and Planning, University of Toronto; 4. Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education, University of Toronto

Building an Inclusive Playground: Playground Design + Playground Surroundings + Communications + Inclusive Programming

Background

1. Importance of Playgrounds
   - Playgrounds are unique physical and social spaces within communities that suspend traditional caregiver roles for a moment of rest and play.

2. Playground Use for Children with Disabilities
   - Some children with disabilities do not have equal access to playgrounds and the benefits they offer.
   - The barriers these children face depend on their disability and are systemic in nature (Moore & Lynch, 2015; Perry et al., 2018).

3. Accessible Vs Inclusive Playgrounds
   - Accessible Playgrounds: Physical barriers are addressed within the playground design process, allowing children with disabilities access to the physical equipment within the playground (Fernelius, 2017).
   - Inclusive Playgrounds: Physical and social barriers are addressed within the playground design process allowing all children, including those with disabilities, to access the physical and social play within the playground (Fernelius, 2017).
   - While inclusive playgrounds are accessible designed, accessible playgrounds are not always inclusively designed for children with disabilities.
   - Inclusive playgrounds are preferred, but not always intuitive for practitioners to plan.

Research Question

What considerations and strategies could help practitioners/stakeholders advance how inclusive playgrounds are designed and experienced?

Methods

International environmental scan of inclusive playground practitioner materials (Contacted 23 practitioners and conducted Google searches).

154 documents obtained.
Duplicates and non-English materials removed.
132 documents kept for review.

- Simultaneously, a scoping review of the academic literature on inclusive playground design was completed.

Acknowledgement

- Canadian Tire Jumpstart Grant: “Play Finds a Way Through Inclusive Playgrounds”

References


Conclusions

1. Inclusive playground design has been engaged in practice-oriented materials, but more attention must be given to the inclusive design of playground surroundings, communications, programming and maintenance.
2. Report considerations and strategies should be engaged at the very beginning of a playground design process and revisited throughout the playground’s lifetime.
3. Inclusive playground design could be greatly enhanced via greater consideration of the lived experiences of children with disabilities and their families.

Results

1. Playground Surroundings
   - Produce surroundings that allow all children to access, play, and stay in the playground.

   Accessible Parking
   - Locate multiple accessible parking spaces close to the playground.

   Facilities & Amenities
   - Include facilities like accessible bathrooms, water fountains, charging stations and mobility device parking.

   Accessible Pathways
   - Create pathways that easily allow two wheelchair to pass by one another.

2. Playground Design
   - Consider designs that facilitates safety, social interaction, and access to diverse play opportunities.

   Site Selection
   - Consider site size, grading, visibility, trees, and proximity to other institutions.

   Play Components
   - Enhance play richness by including accessible equipment that facilitates a diversity of play types.

   Layout
   - Place equipment of varying challenge levels in close proximity to one another to facilitate social interaction between different groups.

3. Playground Communications
   - Consider communication strategies that allow anyone to plan a trip to the playground with the most up-to-date information on its condition.

   Websites
   - Use a website as a centralized resource for accessibility information, maintenance updates, and promotional material.

   Social Media
   - Use social media as one way to notify the community about maintenance or programming updates at the playground.

4. Playground Programming
   - Use programming to take advantage of and leverage the inclusive infrastructure to facilitate inclusive play between children in ways they can be replicated outside the program.

   Program Promotion
   - Advertise program details and timings using onsite signage and/or online posts.

   Staff Training
   - Provide ongoing training on inclusive play strategies for staff members.

   Program Content
   - Include both adult-led and child led play, and promote social interaction between different groups.

So What?

These considerations and strategies will help Holland Bioview families to access, play, stay, and feel welcome within their community playground environments.