

Wayne Leighton
Royal Road School Sabbatical Report - Play

I would like say how grateful I was to be given this opportunity to think about what we have done, what we are doing and what we could do next in our play journey.

Play

Royal Road School was one of half a dozen schools that took part in a play study with AUT in 2013 led by Professor Grant Schofield.

The initial study was about how active monitored children would be before and after a new adventure playground was constructed. It became much more than we expected and became a review of our whole approach to play. AUT worked with us and a play expert who helped us review our whole approach to school play.

Where practical we have changed the rules so that if the Teacher on duty sees children playing a game that seems a bit rough or out of the ordinary they do not stop the game, they watch and see if intervention is needed. If they do need to intervene then they do it in a way that has minimum impact for example modifying the game slightly rather than saying that you cannot play it.

We have modified many of the games that children play by simply no longer saying no.

We also have a really well designed durable playground.

What children can currently do...

Trees

We have a group of Pohutukawa trees that the children are allowed to climb. We have not put a height limit restriction but we have talked about not going too high for you, and treating the trees well. We have never had anyone fall out but we have had the odd child get stuck when they go too high – all part of learning!

Rugby

Our children are allowed to play unsupervised tackle rugby at lunch and play, something they do enthusiastically. The only restriction is that they must wear a mouth guard. The other guidelines are pretty basic – don't play if you can't handle getting tackled. Don't play if you can't handle getting hurt. Don't play if you are not allowed to get your clothes ripped.

Sticks

So basic. We have never said that our children can play with sticks. We have just not told them not to. Mainly boys Year 1 – 4. Many gun fights take place and a thousand deaths are acted out.

Scooters & skateboards

Children can bring these any day. There is an area that was not used for much that is now set aside for them. They also like going down the hill on the concrete path.

Teachers on duty

We always have two teachers on duty. It is emphasized that if they see a different or unusual type of play happening they are to observe first. If they need to step in then they are told to do it in a minimal way, only modifying the game as needed.

Adventure playground

The equipment on our adventure playground has been really well thought out. Each piece is well designed and has proved to be very durable. All parts are popular with the children and are well used. Particular favourites are the various spinners and the rocker. Our playground was supplied by Playground People Limited who supplied quality products and excellent service and back up.

Bike track

Our latest undertaking has been to build a bike track that opened at the start of this year. We were introduced to this concept by Sport Waitakere who introduced us to Paul McArdle and his Bike On Trust that he started in the Hawkes Bay. Paul spent time in Holland and then after moving back to New Zealand was concerned that Kiwi kids weren't riding bikes so he came up with the great idea of putting bike tracks and bikes into schools. Our bike track was designed and built by the team at Woodhill Mountain Bike Park who were excellent to deal with and have built us a sand stone track with optional jumps and a pump track that caters for, challenges and entertains 5 – 13 year olds. The track was made possible through a generous donation from The Trusts Community Foundation and the management of the project was supported by Henderson Rotary.

Our bikes have been purchased from Avanti Westgate and the quality of the bikes and the back-up they provide has been outstanding. Avanti really want to build a relationship with the school and they are maintaining the bikes.

Both the vision and the support the Bike On Trust have provided and continue to do so, has been excellent. They have been a great support to the school and Paul and Toni were excellent to deal with.

We have 5 to 13 year olds confidently riding and their bike time is a highlight of their week.

What we are going to do next...

Bikes

Royal Road School sits on a busy street adjacent to the North Western Motorway. We want our children to ride their own bikes to and from school but we are working with Rochelle from Avanti so children who wish to ride to and from will be required to complete a bike road riding course. Longer term we want our senior students to ride to a trip destination rather than catching a bus.

Trees

Adjacent to our rugby field we have a group of native trees that were planted about 12 years ago and have been well established. We want to clear out underneath these trees for hut building and adventuring. This area will be to cater mainly for our junior students and we will also provide building materials for huts and shelters.

Music

Playground People Limited will be supplying us with an outdoor set of drums that can be played by hand. Our students are passionate drummers. A group perform weekly at our assembly. We are going to create an outdoor drum circle.

Fire

This is an element missing from our children's play. We plan to install a pizza oven that all classes will use to cook with. Herbs will come from our own gardens.

Kitchen

As part of our next 5ypp we will be building a kitchen that will be used by all classes and parents. It is our aim that each class will eat some type of meal together every fortnight using either our fresh produce or fruit and vegetables that the school has harvested and preserved. We want parents to be central to the running of this facility and for it to be open for community programmes as well.

As an Enviroschool, the pizza oven and kitchen will be a hub for a number of our programmes and, we hope, a number of community events as well.

What we could do in the future...

Water

We would like to design a water feature. Our EnviroCouncil is currently working with Neal Bent (engineer from ABB) which was facilitated by Gay Watson from Futureintech. We are also entering the project into the Transpower Neighbourhood Engineer Awards. They are exploring further uses that we could make for the excess electricity that is created by our windmill that currently pumps water from our tank to water native trees in our shade house. I would like the water feature to be interactive and fun so we have wet happy children.

Climbing

I am looking at the idea of a horizontal climbing wall. I want to go as high as we can and to make it as challenging as possible, without having to have harnesses, only a fall surface. This still needs more research.

Make & break

An area with a range of tools dedicated to construction and destruction. I would like to establish a relationship with the local bailing station and get timber and wheels. It would be great to have children building trolleys as well as pulling things apart to see how they work. A range of tools would be available for the students to use.

More hills and planks

We kept the soil from the construction of the bike track. This was used to build simple earth mounds for the children to play on. It is impressive to see how popular this is, particularly with our lower junior students. I would like to construct a series of mounds for our children to play on and around as well as some planks for bridges.

Conclusion

Our journey is far from over but what we have implemented, constructed and changed in our practice has already had a significant positive effect on our playground. The critical part of the success has been the change in our attitudes as supervising adults, and the critical part of that has been not to say no, but to watch and only intervene if it is unsafe, and even then if only to modify as a first option.

Happy, engaged, creative children having fun and playing hard out.

Play Ground People Ph. (09)294 8742

Sport Waitakere Ph. (09)966 3120

Bike On Trust office: (06)877 8020 mob 0277 479 192

Woodhill Mountain Bike Park Mob: 027 278 0969