

ArtPlay Backyard

Animating the public outdoor environment through artful play



ArtPlay Backyard

City Beats

Evolution

Signal 37

The ACCESS Program: An Australia Council for the Arts Creative Community Development Initiative



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au/news_and_activities/projects/artplay/the_access_program](http://education.unimelb.edu.au/news_and_activities/projects/artplay/the_access_program)

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The mother said that the appeal of the ArtPlay Backyard offerings was that the materials didn't fit perfectly together. She noted that her daughter spent a while just fitting cable ties together, "just to see what they would make." The obstacles against making things stand upright, for example, made herself and her child develop their own ideas, working together, which was fun. However, she was grateful when a City of Melbourne landscape architect passed by and gave some simple structural advice. She also noted that this sort of creative activity is a great alternative to technology-based entertainment, a statement echoed many times by other parents.

Background

ArtPlay is a permanent community arts space managed by the City of Melbourne. Open to children aged from three to thirteen years, the facility offers diverse artist-led programs involving multiple art forms and serves a broad community including, artists, parents, guardians and teachers.¹

The ArtPlay Backyard Project involved a partnership between ArtPlay and the City of Melbourne Urban Design and Community Services who together explored the immediate use and future design of the outdoor 'backyard' space immediately behind ArtPlay. This project forms part of a larger initiative entitled the ACCESS Program funded by the Australian Council for the Arts.²

At the time ArtPlay was established (2004) so too was a nearby playground and for several years these two sites for children have co-existed without connecting. In 2010 the ArtPlay Backyard project was initiated. The intention was to extend what ArtPlay offered beyond largely indoors and booked programs to a wide range of free outdoor experiences for children and families. In doing so ArtPlay hoped to engage a wider public participation, consult with further families as to their needs and interests and ultimately contribute to the redevelopment of a space dedicated to accessible and creative 'artful' play. This initiative provided an opportunity for ArtPlay to also reflect on the existing and more bounded indoors programs.



1. <http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/artplay/Pages/ArtPlayHome.aspx>

2. For more information go to http://education.unimelb.edu.au/news_and_activities/projects

The Project

The ArtPlay Backyard project was open to children and their families from the general public as well as targeted disadvantaged schools and culturally diverse community playgroups. The project comprised of four modules involving a series of interactive sessions normally running from forty-five minutes to one-hour. The practices of each module were orientated to particular project goals and informed by the learning gained from previous modules. Sessions were well supported by adult facilitators including, artists, designers, ArtPlay staff, the ACCESS coordinator, early childhood professionals and teachers.

	MODULE 1 August 2010 March 2011	MODULE 2 July 2011	MODULE 3 January 2012	MODULE 4 February 2012
Focus	Artist-led experiences (Outdoors)	Open-studio consultation (Indoors)	ArtPlay staff facilitated experiences (Outdoors)	Artist and Designer-led experiences (Outdoors)
Participants	8 artists 44 school participants 215 public child participants, including those from 4 facilitated community groups.	3 designers 35 school participants 61 public child participants, including one community playgroup	6 ArtPlay staff 187 children	1 artist and 1 designer 101 children

Project Summary

The Project was conceived and realised by nine artists, two landscape architects, a designer and numerous ArtPlay support staff. The Access Coordinator ³ was integral in recruiting schools and community playgroups considered marginalized or disadvantaged, and facilitated communications with children and families throughout each session.

- Four modules involving over 40 interactive sessions
- Open to children and their families from the general public
- Free of charge and largely non-booked
- Sessions ran from forty-five minutes to one-hour
- Sessions facilitated by artists, Artplay staff, and City of Melbourne landscape architects
- Activities were informally presented, open-ended and largely child-directed
- Activities allowed children of different ages to engage at a level appropriate to them
- Families could enter and leave the sessions as they wished
- Pre-school and school groups from disadvantaged, marginalized communities and hard to reach communities were supported to attend.

Module 1 consisted of a series of thirty-three 45-minute sessions that promoted extended creative play, stimulated by the artist modeling. The artist-guided activities included object play and mark making, water play, foam block construction, Indigenous story telling, clay play and dramatic play. In each of these sessions the artists introduced key materials and ideas that were openly explored by the participants.



Module 2 consisted series of seven 'Open Studio' indoor experiences that were led by two City of Melbourne landscape architects, a designer and an ArtPlay support staff member. The ArtPlay environment was set up as a scale model of the nearby outdoor space. Programmed to involve the general public and targeted pre-school school groups, the sessions were planned so that participants could actively and playfully construct with materials in a space that simulated a hypothetical Backyard environment.



Module 3 continued outdoors and centred on participant-led selection and engagement with a wide variety of open-ended materials. ArtPlay support staff facilitated three sessions.



Module 4 engaged participants in three sessions undertaken in a defined workspace outside. Led by a ceramic artist and a landscape designer, children and families were invited to explore clay, making links to the nearby natural environment, and also create a collection of clay tiles that would eventually be installed in the final development of the ArtPlay Backyard.



3. The ACCESS coordinator was responsible for program development and participant relationship building throughout the ArtPlay Backyard project.

4. Parent

Project Outcomes

They were helpful and inspiring. Obviously experienced with children. We were impressed by the way the staff spoke to the kids - respecting and challenging. The children led the activities and the ArtPlay staff helped by providing extra materials and encouragement. Parent

The Backyard sessions attracted many families who had never been to ArtPlay before indicating that the openness of the program and its orientation to play clearly attracted families who otherwise may have been reluctant to engage in a recreational family arts experience. The outcomes of this initiative include:

- 542 children (birth to twelve years) participated
- Majority of participants had never attended Artplay before
- 94% of respondents reported that they enjoyed the program
- Longer average length of stay by participants than scheduled indoor Artplay preschool workshops
- The practices of each module informed the development of subsequent modules
- Adult modeling and the use of sensory-rich and transformative materials promoted 'artful play'
- The opportunity to transform materials and their environment was a key factor to participants' engagement
- Artists found a balance between providing an artistic model and allowing participants to experiment independently, creating a reciprocal and responsive relationship
- The delivery of sessions in the outdoor Backyard space provided a neutral space that encouraged the participation of many families who had never attended ArtPlay before, and knew little or nothing about what went on inside the enclosed ArtPlay building
- A wide range of consultation processes were explored including observation, in-situ task-stimulated interviews and photographic documentation

- A successful bid to the City of Melbourne to begin the first phase of capital works in the ArtPlay backyard environment. The outcome of the year one capital works has been an extension of the deck at the back of the building together with additional storage for outdoor art making materials.



Research

The ArtPlay Backyard project presented an opportunity to document in situ, and in detail, how children and families responded to the experiences introduced to the outdoor environment. Information was gathered through observations, photographs and video recordings, and informal interviews undertaken by researchers with support from ArtPlay staff. In addition a representative sample of families were surveyed. Artists, designers and ArtPlay staff were engaged in recorded interviews and discussions, generally undertaken immediately following a Backyard session. As part of this project a variety of consultation strategies were developed, including engaging children in practical design task that stimulated child reflection. The involvement of City of Melbourne landscape designers in several sessions enabled these professionals to learn further about the needs and interests of children, drawing directly from observation and interaction. For more information on the research design for this project see the ACCESS Program Report.⁵

⁵ For more information go to http://education.unimelb.edu.au/news_and_activities/projects/artplay/the_access_program

Access

The ArtPlay Backyard project engaged 542 participants, most of who had never attended ArtPlay before. Children, primarily aged three to eight years and families from diverse backgrounds, were attracted by the offer of free, drop-in or flexibly booked and accessible play and art experiences. The data indicated that families were encouraged to participate because the sessions were:

- free (encouraging more families to try the activities),
- open-ended (allowing families to follow their own creative impulses),
- outdoors (fostering a relaxed atmosphere in an 'unbounded' environment),
- non-booked (allowing families to start and finish according to their own time commitments and levels of interest), and
- for all ages (offering whole families a chance to create together).

Sessions held on weekends during term time mostly attracted families with young children, while those held during school holidays attracted more families with older children. Most sessions involved both pre-school and school-aged children. The public-access workshops attracted many families who had never been to ArtPlay before indicating that the openness of the project and its orientation to play clearly attracted some families who may not have otherwise subscribed to a recreational family arts program. Free of cost and structured to allow families to come and go freely, the project sessions gave families the flexibility to trial the arts and play experiences on offer.

Greeted by the ACCESS Coordinator, artists and ArtPlay staff acting as hosts and facilitators, the children and their families were immediately made to feel welcome and at ease. More than half of the participants in Modules 3 and 4 did not know about the workshops before they saw them from the playground or walking by. Several families commented that they appreciated being able to access a free arts activity, especially if they had a large family. In contrast to this flexible access, to book an indoor ArtPlay workshop was more of an unknown to families, and for some, with little experience with the arts, potentially inhibiting and intimidating. A small but notable percentage (8%) of families who attended Modules 3 and 4 had participated in earlier Backyard sessions.

The ArtPlay Backyard family profile largely mirrored that of those who attended the indoor ArtPlay workshops, namely well educated, living in, or near, central Melbourne, largely Anglo-European, with a

number of families from Asian backgrounds. The open-ended and participant-led structure of the sessions supported by high adults to child ratios, enabled children with different needs to successfully participate at their own levels. The lack of suitable toilet facilities, particularly for children with disabilities, was identified as a priority for any future redevelopment.

To broaden participation in the project a scoping study was undertaken to identify groups, play groups, pre-school centres and schools who might be interested in attending arts and play workshops, but were potentially restricted to do so because of barriers created by language, distance or economic disadvantage. To do so, the ACCESS Coordinator initiated and developed relationships with individuals linked to each targeted group, who liaised and advocated for their communities to participate. She also matched group workshops with artists who were responsive, communicative and open to develop workshops in consultation with each participant group. The positive response of these groups to their ArtPlay Backyard experiences was evident by several groups returning to ArtPlay for other indoor workshops. To generate such return-participation has required ArtPlay, led by the ACCESS coordinator, to build relationships and develop customised workshops aligned with particular interests and needs of the targeted pre-school and school groups. Those groups that have not gained such support have rarely returned, even though they expressed a high level of satisfaction.

Other strategies for continuing relationships have included the establishment of the Friends of ArtPlay card, which gives targeted ArtPlay Backyard participants free entry to indoor programs. At the time of writing the Friends of ArtPlay card has not been widely used and it was outside the capacity of the evaluation to track whether or not children engaged in the outdoor project had returned to participate in further indoor ArtPlay workshops. All ArtPlay Backyard children and families have been offered copies of the ArtPlay Backyard publication which includes parts translated into several languages including Vietnamese, Arabic, Somali, Japanese, and Chinese (Mandarin).

A summary of the facilitated group information is in the Table 1 on page 9:

Table 1: Group information

Name of facilitated group	Reason for invitation to the project	Further relationship development
City of Yarra Vietnamese Playgroup (Modules 1 and 2)	May experience barriers to participation at ArtPlay because of language.	Participating in Community Playgroup program in 2012.
Morwell Primary School (Module 1)	Had been to ArtPlay before. Experienced difficulty attending ArtPlay because it is a country school. Has a high proportion of Indigenous students who may not otherwise visit ArtPlay.	
Carlton Primary School (Module 1 and 2)	School in the City of Melbourne. High proportion of students from a NESB. Had attended ArtPlay workshops in the past.	A tailored program has been developed in consultation with the school, to take place throughout 2012.
North Melbourne Japanese Playgroup (Module 1)	May experience barriers to participation at ArtPlay because of language.	Some participants have returned to participate in other ArtPlay programs.
Eastern Melbourne Playgroup (Module)	May experience barriers to participation at ArtPlay because of language.	
Melbourne City Child Care Centre (Module 1)	City of Melbourne residents who may not have attended ArtPlay before.	Participated in ArtPlay/City of Melbourne Children's week project, 2011.
Newlands Primary School (Module 1)	Economically disadvantaged school.	
Ardeer South Primary School (Module 1)	Have participated in several ArtPlay projects. Economically disadvantaged school with many children from a NESB.	Participated in 2012 music project, City Beats.

Engagement

There was a high level of engagement in the ArtPlay Backyard sessions. Children and families were quick to take up the activities offered and demonstrated independent and self-motivated exploration. While in the public sessions children and families could choose to leave when they wanted they consistently chose to stay for most or all of the one-hour sessions. In Modules 3 and 4, the average length of stay in a session was 50 minutes, which was longer than the scheduled time for most indoor ArtPlay preschool workshops. The most common reasons given for families choosing to leave Backyard sessions were heat and a lack of shade and seating, requirements that need to be addressed in any future development of the space. ArtPlay staff progressively responded to this need through the purchase of umbrellas and light-weight tables. Arising from this project has been a successful application to the City of Melbourne to develop an annex to ArtPlay, which will serve as a storage space and adaptable seating area for families.

Engagement was supported by the invitational, open, unhurried and play-focused nature of the sessions. The Backyard workshops were focused on exploration more so than production. This orientation encouraged children and families to play with and lead their own participation. In surveys and interviews parents commented on the "great freedom to experiment". The open nature of the sessions allowed families from different cultural backgrounds to engage in a variety of ways. For example, mothers in a predominantly Vietnamese playgroup did not play with their children (who were fully engaged by themselves), but made constructions as an adult group. This was in contrast to a group of Japanese mothers who led their children through each activity and took turns to swing the children in hammocks, singing Japanese folksongs.

The immediate outdoor area behind ArtPlay is a large open fine gravel area. There are some plantings on the perimeter of the space but overall it is uninviting. The introduction of sensory-rich and, at times, unexpected materials (such as a free-standing door) into this space acted as a stimulus for engagement. Purposefully chosen by artists and designers, materials were aesthetically stimulating, diverse and readily transformable. These prompted imaginative play and included sticks, sand, clay and water, and a wide range of recycled manufactured materials including, cardboard tubes, rope, fabric pieces and foam blocks. These readily manipulated materials allowed and encouraged the children, as noted by a parent, "to do whatever they want." Families responded very positively to the use of clay that was engaging to children of diverse ages and diverse abilities, and also encouraged co-creation amongst adults and children. As one parent appreciated, it was "really nice to have unstructured play and freedom to get wet, dirty, play with different aged kids." One parent in Module 3 questioned the safety of materials like long sticks, scissors and heavy pebbles. In contrast to this view, most families valued the access to such diverse materials, noting that excessive safety concerns were restricting creative play opportunities for their children elsewhere. Cheryl Cameron, a Youth and Children's Services Support Officer who was supporting a play group attending, made an impassioned statement about allowing children to play in safe, but not over controlled and boring environments:

I love the look on kids faces when they can actually affect a change on something themselves... children need to be able to play with things that have an element of risk.... let's celebrate adventure!

In Module 1 in particular the placement of objects in the outdoor space, for example small chairs, long ropes, a free standing hinged door, created an incongruous dynamic with the surrounding environment, one that drew attention and prompted interest and inquiry. Throughout the workshops artists and ArtPlay staff experimented with various arrangements of materials. ArtPlay staff member Ben Goodes speculated that where a space is arranged in an aesthetically interesting way the environment itself became the "host" or the "third educator", stimulating creative play and relationships.



Coloured Sand

Bags of differently coloured sand were made available and children used them in a variety of ways. They drizzled the sand into complex patterns and walked through it. Families enjoyed playing with the sand together, mixing, drawing and pouring it like paint, unburdened by any expectations of being 'artistic'.

Artist and ArtPlay Staff Modeling and Co-creation

Throughout the sessions unplanned arrangements and installations co-created by children and adults emerged, morphed and dissipated. The children were engaged by guided interactions with the existing environment through, for example, drawing into the gravel, playing in rain-created puddles and rolling down the nearby small hill. Families were clearly thankful for the support provided the ArtPlay artists and staff, as evident in their comments.

They were helpful and inspiring. Obviously experienced with children.

We were impressed by the way the staff spoke to the kids; respecting and challenging.

The children led the activities and the ArtPlay staff helped by providing extra materials when needed and encouragement.

To engender further interest, the artists and ArtPlay staff modelled their own playful explorations. In doing so, they alerted children to possibilities, and gave them permission to act upon, and make change to, an environment previously foreign to them. The artists introduced new ways of engaging in outdoor 'artful play' which parents responded positively to through comments such as, "this is a great activity. I wouldn't have thought of this." At the same time artists reported that they earned to "back off" to let children explore by themselves. Theatre arts artist Heidi noted that she was needed much less as a co-player in the ArtPlay Backyard workshops compared to the ArtPlay indoor sessions, as the children and families seemed to be happy to explore the experience on their own. In this case, she provided an artistic framework for the session and acted as a facilitator throughout, but did not direct the creative outcome. During the workshops artists and staff responded to direct requests for help as well as using their own knowledge and intuition to offer materials, ideas or physical assistance. This reciprocal and responsive relationship was described as a "dance" by one of the ArtPlay staff.



Co-play

At a workshop in Module 3 ArtPlay artist and support staff member Briony played with an infant (about 15 months old) for a lengthy period. The girl was sitting on a foam mat, surrounded by short dowel rods and coloured sand. While she talked casually with the parent, Briony engaged the child in a game knocking sticks together. Then they played with the sand, rubbing it with their hands, drawing in it with the sticks and their fingers, and exploring the sounds it made. It became a subtle dance where the girl and Briony responded to and copied each other, as well as playing with the materials individually. This combination of individual and co-play seemed to place them on an equal footing and engaged the child for a long period of time. At one stage Briony drew a circle in the sand, surrounding the child. The following week she responded to two girls' play by creating a circle around them out of foam strips (they said they were making mud for pigs). Both times Briony had an impulse to 'frame' the play. Other children later discovered this circle and confined their play in it. Later Briony said that she wasn't trying to join the girls' play; she was just responding to what they had started. This points to an interesting aspect of the playworker/artist role that ArtPlay Backyard staff members take on. They need to have an artists' eye for the creative possibilities of the materials so they can support and extend, rather than lead, the children's play.

Creativity and Artistic Experience

Artful Play

For young children, as for many professional artists, art and play are integrally connected. The ArtPlay Backyard project animated and activated the outside space by stimulating and deepening the possibilities for play through arts-orientated interactions and processes. Art and play both involve open-ended exploration, elaboration, transformation, visualisation and metaphorical thinking. These characteristics align with creativity and accommodate multiple and unexpected meanings. In the context of the ArtPlay Backyard the experiences offered were ones that encouraged creative inquiry, transformation, and aesthetic sensitivity, a combined focus that could be termed as 'artful play.'

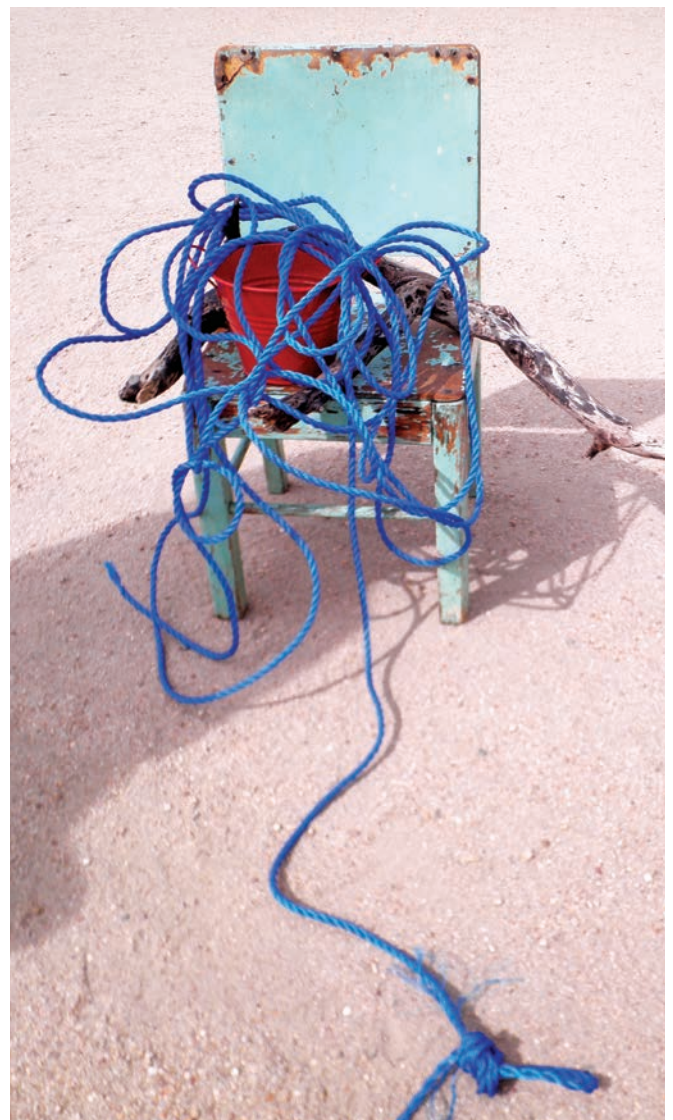
Opportunities to Transform

The opportunities given to transform materials and their environment, a significant factor in engagement, were also a key stimulus for children's creative inquiries. Parents commented on the, "great freedom to experiment" and that the opportunities for "unstructured play encouraged problem-solving for both parents and children." One grandmother explained the appeal of simple natural materials as,

A lot of the children now have excessive material toys and I think offering them things like this really taps into their creativity. You're just seeing it right now (she gestures towards her grandson who is tipping shells onto the ground) and a stick the other day, and some sand – how good was that? I mean that was stunning!

Children and families were highly engaged in exploring, creating, experimenting and problem solving using simple-to-manipulate materials, like sticks, funnels and water wheels, clay and sensory-rich paper. Parents were appreciative of these experiences that they noted were not commonly available in public spaces.

School groups were commonly interested in larger scale constructions and collaborative representations. More conscious of their known peers, they often worked together to create something that they could play with, ranging from giant sand circles, to cardboard apartment buildings and spy camps.



Aesthetic awareness and Ephemeral Art

The children's creative and artistic outcomes, more often ephemeral than permanent, were made and acted out, through embodied connections with materials, objects and space, which indicated innovative thinking and aesthetic attunement. Even though Backyard participants frequently made elaborate constructions with a great deal of care and time, they were nearly always content to dismantle or leave for others to extend upon. The enjoyment and sense of achievement, evident in the children's focused interactions, was the opportunity to combine and relate materials more so that an ambition to create any permanent marks or structures.

During all of the sessions observed children were encouraged to explore and be alert to serendipitous and unexpected occurrences, ones that stimulated deep and sustained creative inquiry. This openness to how an experience can unfold points to the significance of the process in play, art making and creativity.

The Backyard artists and designers modelled and prompted children to explore the spatial and aesthetic possibilities of objects that could be placed, similar to an artist's installation, in various parts of the outdoor

environment. For example, in Module 1 objects including small chairs, ropes and a free-standing door were located, somewhat incongruously, in relation to outdoor spaces and forms. Some objects generated social play and drama, while others directed children to map, stack, wrap, enclose or delineate the spaces they were working within.

The arts and design experiences offered to the children encouraged them to explore further, aesthetically and symbolically, their natural inclinations to play. The artistry in these encounters was evident in the level of aesthetic awareness and deliberation in the children's actions. Children were thoughtful in their aesthetic processes, whether it was dragging a stick slowly in a spiraling line on the gravel, or looking attentively at the play of colours and shadows created by a collection arranged materials floating in a transparent tub of water. Even when building a utilitarian play object such as a marble run in a Module 1 workshop, a young boy made purposeful decisions about the sequence of coloured and plain tubes that he used. Artists and staff played a role in reinforcing this to participants by commenting on children's creative decisions and offering to extend it where appropriate.



Cultural Citizenship and Social Connectedness

Positive Social Relations

The relationships between participants throughout the ArtPlay Backyard sessions were very positive. The flexible and informal nature of the sessions helped to create a relaxed, unbounded and friendly atmosphere, one conducive to artful play. Given that the sessions were one-off there was little time for participants to establish new social relations, though there were many instances of incidental social exchanges. There was a harmonious sharing of materials but few instances of collaborative play between families. Some families did comment positively on the opportunities to connect with others, to play with different aged children and to engage in a creative activity as a family. Families were aware of each others creative work and frequently a construction left by one family formed the basis of another's explorations.

In a few cases families participated multiple Backyard sessions and in doing so developed stronger relationships with the regular artists, designers, ArtPlay staff and other return families. One boy, Kyle, aged five years, was particularly interested in creative exploration through construction and was very interested in talking to Jeff, a City of Melbourne landscape architect. The same boy took a day off school to attend another session so that he could assist the designer to develop a plan for the future Backyard development. This child and many others appreciated the opportunities to work with professionals committed to their creative practice. This sentiment was noted by a teacher working with students with additional needs, wrote in an email to ArtPlay after the workshops, "It was really lovely to get out of the school setting and watch how the students interact with different adults in an entirely different setting."



Families Connecting as Co-players

Central to community development is family cohesiveness. The open and interactive nature of the sessions encouraged families to co-play and co-create amongst themselves. Particularly in Module 3, where materials were made freely available to families without any artist direction, the families engaged autonomously in play and art making.

The relaxed and at times deep focus of children and families indicated a meaningful shared experience, one in which participants had become comfortably connected to the surrounding environment. Such a connection was important to families for varying reasons. Open play spaces were highly sought after by families with young children who lived

in city apartments. For regular visitors to the city reliable, safe and engaging play spaces served as both a launching pad, or retreat from, the bustling city precinct. For visitors unfamiliar with the city, including national and international tourists, the Backyard workshops offered a free non-booked experience that they could readily connect with.

A key goal of the project was to actively invite children whose families were less able or less confident to come to the city. To do so it engaged play, child-care groups and school groups. For these groups the incentive for participation was largely to experience something different and creative. Whilst no new social connections were formed amongst these groups their positive encounters with the Backyard space may stimulate further return visits in the future.



Community Consultations

A significant strand of inquiry running throughout the ArtPlay Backyard project involved consulting children and families re the potential re-development of the space. To do so artists, designers and ArtPlay staff and the ACCESS Coordinator adopted a range of interconnected strategies.

Bridging the 'imagined' possibilities indicated in survey response with the realizable possibilities of a specific environment was largely the role of two City of Melbourne landscape architects and a designer. Rather than simply relying on their interpretations of the dis-embodied survey responses they engaged directly in the ArtPlay Backyard sessions, as observers, co-players (Modules 1 & 3) and as session leaders (Modules 2 & 4). For the lead landscape architect, Jeff Nelson, this opportunity to observe children directly, which he had rarely done before, enabled him to learn about how children play and interact with materials, space and each other. He stated,

Observing children in this space has been really interesting because often as designers we don't get nearly enough time watching kids in the actual spaces that we're designing.

Informed by direct observations, and supported by extensive video and photographic documentation, designers, ArtPlay staff and artists collaboratively planned subsequent Backyard sessions. Module 2 of the project involved tasks that explicitly set out to engage children in the physical re-design of the Backyard space. Children were immediately told, "You are the designers today." Following this the children, individually and in groups created models and drawings that represented their ideas for what should be included in the redeveloped Backyard. Jeff commented;

One of our goals is to gain idea generators about how to create a Backyard for ArtPlay. The core part of these three days is about giving kids an opportunity to feed into that. What they create won't be literally connected to the space outside, but they will drum up some exciting ideas for me to consider in relation to forms and how kids interact with different arrangements with objects and shapes; like, what pulls a child to come and play.

By exploring various workshop experiences with the children, ranging from artist-guided installations to child-led environment design workshops, a deeper and more context-based picture was gained as to the needs and possibilities of the outdoor space. (See Appendix for child and family recommendations for the development of the Backyard environment).

For families to feel that their views have been really valued they need feedback. To this end ArtPlay developed several photo-montage outdoor posters which provided a publically-available record of the project activities. For example, school children returning to ArtPlay for the Open Studio session were delighted to recognize one of their peers on the outdoor poster. ArtPlay also developed an illustrated booklet that was representative of the activities undertaken in Modules 1 and 2. This booklet was given and mailed out free to past participants and served as stimulating introductory reference for first-time participants in modules 3 and 4. These strategies, along with the regular informal verbal feedback provided to families during each session, indicated to children and parents that their views and values really mattered in relation to the development of the ArtPlay Backyard.



Making their Mark

The final series of outdoor sessions, lead by a ceramic artist and a City of Melbourne landscape architect, focused largely on producing a collection of child made tiles that could be incorporated permanently into the final redevelopment of the site. Whilst the children's engagement in these sessions were largely focused on the immediate enjoyment of making and playing, the opportunity to make something finished and permanent was also motivating, particularly to older children. The intention behind the project, namely to create an environment with, for and by young children, was clearly visible in this workshop activity. The ArtPlay Backyard sessions, framed by artists and designers, emphasized child-led creations. Whether these were ephemeral or permanent, children were given the opportunity to represent and act out their ideas and in doing make their mark on the outdoor environment. Given the permission to do so, children were not only able to connect physically with the space, they were also acknowledged as being the co-owners and co-creators of a public environment.

Conclusion

The ArtPlay Backyard project set out to animate a previously lifeless and disconnected outdoor public space. To do so artists and designers worked together to develop a series of free and engaging 'artful play' experiences. Through open and creative encounters with aesthetically stimulating materials, facilitated by artist playworkers, families were invited and encouraged to interact with the environment and with others. When given license to act upon and make changes to the outdoor Backyard, rather than simply pass through it, families gravitated to a previously vacant space. Free and largely non-booked, the ArtPlay Backyard program enabled and attracted diverse families, most of who had never attended indoor ArtPlay workshops.

Working with designers this project has generated a successful capital bid to the City of Melbourne that has resulted in the first phase of redevelopment of the Backyard environment. The partnerships established through this program have informed

the initiation of a Play Policy for the City of Melbourne. The Project has also led to the incorporation, into the City of Melbourne Arts and Culture policy, of an objective to test the feasibility of creating an on line resource for artists and producers, who do or wish to work with children and families. The potential transferable learning stemming from the Backyard Project is now being explored in other City of Melbourne programs that involve children and families, including libraries and festivals.

The Project has actively engaged ArtPlay in diverse forms of family-led practice and community consultation. Informed by how families acted and interacted, not just what they said, City of Melbourne designers have been immersed directly in community engagement that will guide the future development of the space. ArtPlay Backyard now forms part of the ongoing ArtPlay program. In combination the outdoor and indoor programs serve to open up and extend the offer of artful play to a broad community of families.



Appendix

ArtPlay Backyard Re-Development: Child and Family Consultation

Landscaping	Program Information/Materials/Equipment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rocks • Trees and water, including a small shallow stream • More grass and plantings • Pathways that allow for some private exploration • Private spaces for small groups of children • Clear visibility for parent supervision • A small gated or otherwise bound area suitable for toddlers. • A sensory area suitable for infants • A walking rope course • Zoned spaces that serve different purposes, for example physical play, social play and dramatic play • Areas that provide distant views • An area for drawing/building/crafting. • Flexibility and adaptability that allows families to interact with and move objects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear program promotion information and regular opening hours • Lockers for valuables • More prominent signage • Area to display child produced constructions and other works • Large tables • Wash basins • Music- making materials. For example plastic bottles which can be filled with different materials to make rattles • Materials varied regularly and available for self-selection. • Sun shaded art desks and drawing boards • Blocks • Short poly pipes that kids can drop items through from one side to another
Shade (the most noted recommendation)	Amenities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awnings and other non-permanent structures (eg. Tents) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible toilets suitable for family use • Disabled table lift for older children with a disability. • Tea and coffee facilities. Water drinking taps
Seating	Water
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water play experiences, including a shallow water stream





