

Loose Parts on the Playground: A Calgary Board of Education Case Study



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**Calgary Board
of Education**

The plan

- ✓ Why outdoor loose parts play?
- ✓ Setting the stage
- ✓ Preparation
- ✓ PLAY
- ✓ Outcomes
- ✓ Looking ahead



“Any school structure of the future, must include the behavior that in the past was accomplished outside of school” (Reilly, 1974, p 33)



More recently, loose parts playground intervention has been shown to increase social skills, physical activity, resilience, and happiness (Farmer et al., 2017; Bundy et al., 2017). As well as engaging a variety of students (Bundy et al, 2008).

The Questions: How do you integrate this into a typical school setting?
What are the outcomes?

Setting the stage

- Elementary School in Southeast Calgary
- Playground with numerous play structures, tarmac, hill area with some trees, large field
- Supportive administrators, teacher champions, and staff
- Prior to loose parts play trial staff agreed that play was important as a right, and in learning.
- Staff stated they held value in risk taking, however were mixed as to whether or not students had access to healthy risk taking in the school setting

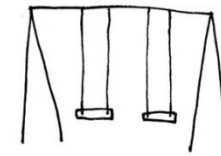


Preparation

- Discussion/brainstorming with City of Calgary
- Staff in-services and collaboration twice before trial and once after
 - Focus on loose parts play in the classroom for one month prior to outdoor trial
 - Surveys were given to staff at all three in services (two pre, one post)
- Parent council engagement before and after trial through School Administration



Staff Feedback



don't forget to play

marc johns

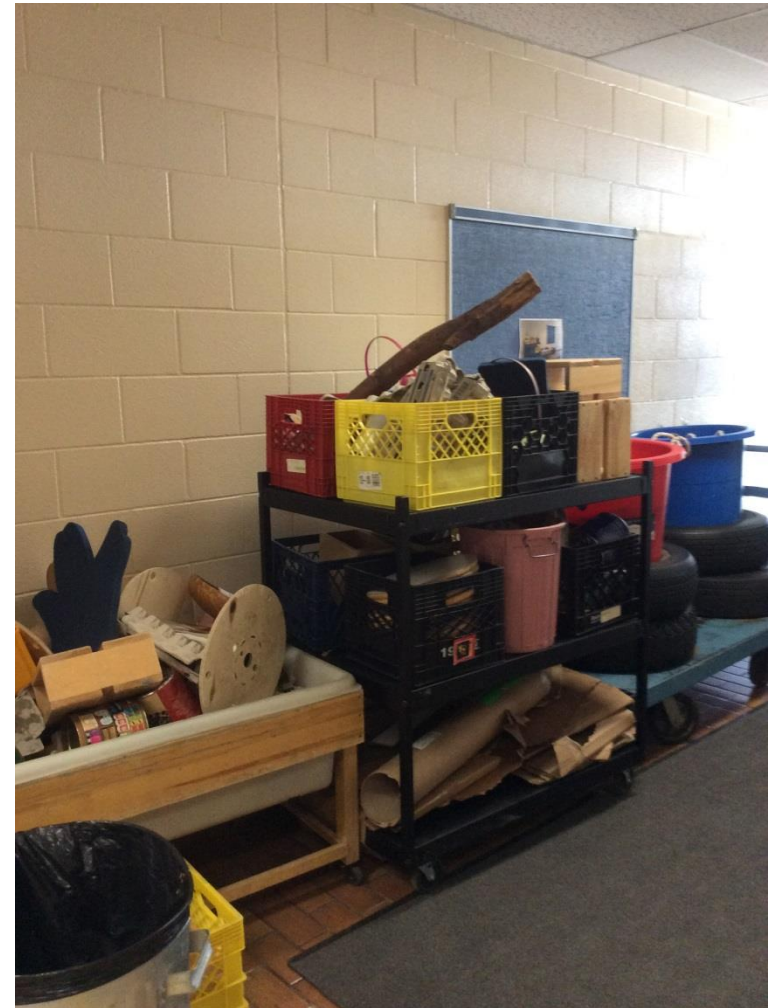
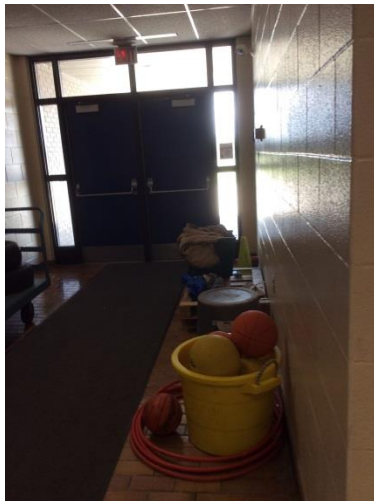
Barriers: time, weather, resources (where do we get the loose parts), social skills/developmental stages of play, supervision, storage space, pressure to meet curriculum demands

Concerns: Safety, controlled space, complex students with behaviour needs, injury, fighting/bullying

Supports: Time, flexibility, intentional plan of opportunities, attitude, access to materials, class size manageable, chances for kids to share, supervision, access to some equipment, supportive administration, already being done in Kindergarten at times, outdoor environment with access to nature at school, Pre-teaching of expectations, reflection by students and teachers

Preparation

- Resources were sourced out through staff requests and general squirreling away of fun materials
- Student leaders were chosen to be responsible for putting loose parts out
- Loose parts and guidelines were reviewed with students and staff before the start of the trial
- Staff focus on “redirect instead of correct”



PLAY



Outcomes

- A variety of students were engaged in the loose parts play
 - Upon observation, older students (grade 4-6) consistently accounted for many of those participating
- Conflict was not reported to decrease significantly, however it was noted that students who otherwise would have had no opportunity to move on after a play opportunity was declined, now had a space to go.
- It was noted that several of the students actively engaged, struggled socially with traditional games and recess based activities.
- Some students were noted to continue to be dysregulated after coming in, however some teachers noticed they were more engaged with loose parts in the classroom, and excited to share their play from the playground in the classroom
- 90% of staff were interested in continuing loose parts and felt it engaged students in more diverse play (10% was undecided)

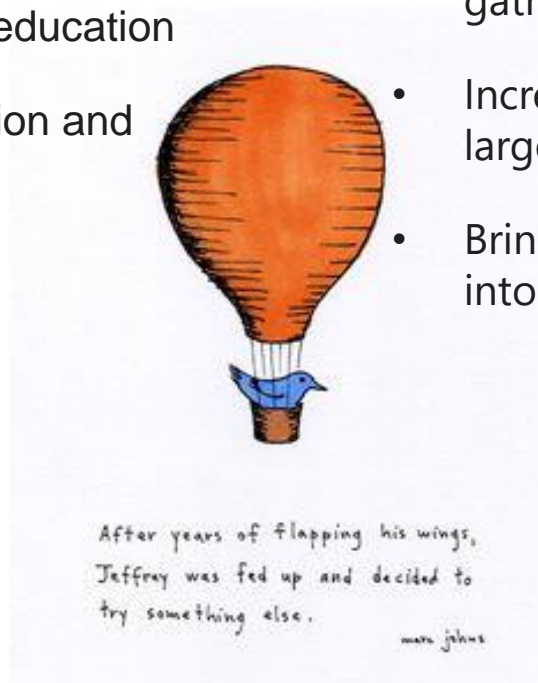
Looking ahead

Factors of success

- Champions within the school and external supports
- Organization and clear expectations
- Staff understanding and education
- Support from administration and leadership

Areas for growth

- Further parent engagement throughout stages
- Student survey and information gathering process (gather more data)
- Increase variety of loose parts/ make larger with outdoor storage
- Bring stories from the playground into the classroom and beyond



References

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Farmer et al. (2017) Change of School Playground Environment on Bullying: A Randomized Controlled Trial, *Pediatrics*, 139 (5) e20163072; DOI: 10.1542/peds.2016-3072

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