



WORLD FORUM IN ACTION

Designing Effective and Inspiring Spaces for Children



A World Forum Foundation Working Forum

March 11-14, 2015

Rotorua, New Zealand



Architects, landscape architects, educators, and environmental advocates gathered in Rotorua, New Zealand, in March 2015, to explore and apply high-level universal principles necessary in designing effective and inspiring indoor and outdoor spaces for children, a result of collaboration between the Nature Action Collaborative for Children and the Global Collaborative OnDesign for Children,

two Working Groups of the World Forum Foundation.

During the course of this unique event, participants gained detailed knowledge about three programs in need of new spaces for children, explored the four principles through case studies and reflections, and worked in interdisciplinary teams to develop concepts and designs for the project sites:

- **The Samaky Community, Siem Reap, Cambodia**
- **MOCCA, Canberra, Australia**
- **ICRI, Asuboi, Ghana, Africa**

To further inspire this hands-on design time, some participants joined one or two days of preconference tours, while all participants visited the



Photo by Kirsten Haugen

Four Guiding Principles for Designing Children's Environments

- The power and importance of **collaboration**.
- The importance of respecting the **context of space and place**.
- The importance of the **connection between inside and outside spaces**.
- The importance of the **intention for the space**.

Whakarewarewa Redwood Forest, the historic Blue Baths, and two distinctive early childhood settings in Rotorua: Ngongothā Central Kids Kindergarten and Tiaki Early Learning Centre.

An additional evening with poster sessions and TED-like talks rounded out a whirlwind four days of action, discussion, and creative design work.

Event Outcomes

Design matters in education.

Both the presentations and the process showed the many ways space impacts our well being and readiness to learn, work, and play. Early educators need to think about space and design in informed ways. The four principles provide a solid starting point for this reflection.

"This conference/forum had cross-sector knowledge, which has proven to be invaluable. I come from a pedagogical lens — design is not my strong point, but I feel I have the confidence to grow a bit more each day."

"Children from all around the world are the benefactors of this event. What better outcome could there possibly be?!"

— Marlise Shadbolt, New Zealand

Collaboration works.

This intensive four-day experience brought together the diverse expertise of architects, landscape designers, environmentalists, and early educators. Though many were meeting for the first time, all 15 multidisciplinary design groups produced creative design proposals that addressed the parameters of the detailed briefs presented by each project site.

"I was thrilled to be 'one professional' at a table of 'professionals' who valued and



Photo by Kirsten Haugen

respected the contributions from others — coming from different fields of expertise (designer, educator, architect). I was able to both contribute and learn."

— Jenny Tippet, New Zealand

We are enriched by our similarities and our differences.

Often we don't have the opportunity or comfort level to work across boundaries of profession, geography, culture, or experience. Even in the short time span of the Working Forum, participants saw these boundaries melt away as they both wrestled with and embraced challenges and differences among them.

"What a fantastic opportunity it was to speak to, and hear about the differences and similarities between different countries in regard to policy, governments, community needs, and varied ideas about the 'best for the child' concept."

— Shannon Woodcock, New Zealand

Authentic challenges result in real work.

One feature that made this Working Forum unique was the amount of hands-on work time devoted to actual projects. Participants had the opportunity to really apply the principles and ideas presented directly to real projects.

"[I appreciated] the special emphasis on the three projects and the sense of accomplishment."

— Mike Wells, United States

worldforumfoundation.org/design2015

A permanent home for those interested in design, with a wealth of resources, including project briefs for the three sites, considerations



Photo by Kirsten Haugen

on design from 11 World Forum Working Groups, numerous presentations, the 15 resulting design proposals, conversations on design, plus regular updates about the three project sites and other issues and resources related to children's environments.

Working Group Provocations

The collaborative nature of this Working Forum extended far beyond the physical and temporal boundaries of the event itself. Eleven World Forum Working Groups submitted considerations for designing environments for children in light of each group's unique professional knowledge, experience, and perspectives. With this input from a diverse group of experts from around the globe, those interested in designing spaces for children have a broad base of input on which to draw. These are excerpts of more comprehensive statements, available in full at worldforumfoundation.org/design2015-considerations/

worthy of a miracle! Action follows thought. We can choose to change. We can choose to design spaces for miracles, not minimums.” — Anita Rui Olds, 1999

■ What are children's perspectives on their spaces, both outdoors and indoors?



■ In what ways does context (climate, geography, economics, community, and culture) affect children's rights with respect to the design of spaces? (And, are there basic rights, outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, that need to be considered before all of the others?)



Co-sponsor of the Working Forum, the Nature Action Collaborative for Children offers design provocations for children, design professionals, educators, and families. For children, NACC states,

We believe it is important that children:

- have daily access to nature-based outdoor and indoor environments in their early childhood programs and schools.
- be respected as competent, powerful learners and risk-takers who have a voice in what they create and learn through nature.
- be supported in developing life skills through holistic nature-based learning.



Children learn from their interactions with people and their environment. The early care and education environment should be developmentally appropriate, allowing children to engage in positive and safe interactions. It may need to be adapted to

ensure that children of all abilities can participate in experiences as fully as possible.



Also a co-sponsor of the Working Forum, OnDesign offers seven principles on designing environments for children. Among them, they quote Anita Rui Olds:

“Children are miracles. Believing that every child is a miracle can

transform the way we design for children's care. When we invite a miracle into our lives, we prepare ourselves and the environment around us. We may set out flowers or special offerings. We may cleanse ourselves, the space, or our thoughts of everything but the love inside us. We make it our job to create, with reverence and gratitude, a space that is

When designing spaces, involve people from your community who have disabilities or family members with disabilities to best understand what really matters in terms of accessibility and participation.... Solving a design challenge in an

inclusion setting is essentially taking what we know from our collective experiences and immersing ourselves in the world of children with special needs, to learn from them with their families, caregivers, and teachers what works and what does not.

Land, earth, sky, water are significant within Indigenous cultures throughout the world. How can these be incorporated in playgrounds in a way that celebrates Indigenous culture?



Family is a significant factor in Indigenous culture. How can playgrounds be designed to acknowledge and develop this concept and celebrate this aspect?



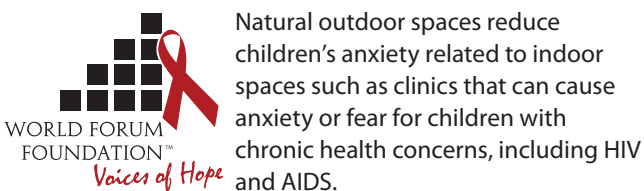
Learning, living, and life are all interconnected within the Indigenous communities; there is little distinction between learning and play. How can this be included when designing playgrounds of the future?

Culture, curriculum, and play are all interwoven in many communities across the globe. How would this impact on a design?

- How can we create safe and secure environments for children during conflict situations at home, school, and in the wider community?



- How can we design materials, equipment, props, and furniture that promote learning, play, and development that are peace oriented?
- How can we design early childhood settings that protect children from the negative impact of violence and conflict, and help them heal afterwards?



Natural outdoor spaces reduce children's anxiety related to indoor spaces such as clinics that can cause anxiety or fear for children with chronic health concerns, including HIV and AIDS.

Gardens are a powerful and easy tool for teaching children and families about good nutrition and healthy alternatives, especially when dealing with medication side effects or other health problems.

Natural environments, where things die and are reborn, offer powerful spiritual connections and metaphors for lifecycle challenges such as loss and separation, which touch so many families living with chronic illness.



Spaces for children should facilitate active and hands-on creative play at a time when both are threatened by societal forces around the world. Whenever possible, those responsible should provide play spaces that are free of advertising and screen-based entertainment.

Additional recommendations: use local materials; invite open-ended play; provide safe, cozy spaces; include loose parts; offer materials at a level children can reach and see; and include wheelchair-friendly surfaces and equipment.

Gather input from children, educators, community members, urban planners, administrative authorities and policymakers, and draw on children's voices or perspectives on things they would like to see or play with.



Children in orphanages or other institutional settings often have a number of emotional issues stemming from abuse, neglect, and abandonment. Anger is often prominent, with unexpected violent outbursts triggered by real or imagined insults.... They need spaces designed with room to run and jump, room for group play, and places where they can find solitude



Balancing the gender identity needs of girls and boys helps to safeguard children from social forces that can otherwise condition them to accept gender stereotypes. How can we empower young children through gender-neutral collaboration in the planning, design, and construction of their ideas?

In what ways can men and women collaborate to provide ample opportunities to practice risk management and bravery, through risk-taking play?

Learn more about the World Forum Working Groups:
worldforumfoundation.org/working-groups

Global Design Projects

Ghana's Asuboi Project

by Eben Lartey, Country Director for International Child Resource Institute

The Global Collaborative OnDesign for Children and Nature Action Collabora-



President of ICRI, Ken Jaffe) met after the Forum, brainstormed on the way forward, and then developed a work productivity workload. It was agreed that we adopt some principles from all five designs and then present to the Local Authority and other key stakeholders for an informed decision to be reached.

Moving on since the Working Forum, we decided to first undertake a more detailed impact assessment and also obtain further accurate data on the demographic characteristics of Asuboi to make the strongest case to all decisionmakers and funders.

ICRI Ghana's team is undertaking the impact assessment as ICRI Global collaborates with us to provide supports as we request them. For this project, participatory approaches are a critical ingredient for both the success and sustainability of the project. We want to ensure that, after the completion of the project, some user fees and other local innovative income production will be more than enough to sustain the project. We want to ensure that prospects of achieving this are bright.

In addition, as part of the overall project, ICRI is in the process of setting up an ECD Teacher Resource Center in the same community of Asuboi. The rationale for setting up this resource centre is to provide

ECD practitioners with hands-on experience in learning and implementing this developmentally appropriate early childhood education campaign that ICRI Ghana has been leading throughout the country. Users of the Center will also be shown how to easily and at no cost transform found items (empty cartons, paper, cardboard, cans, rocks, sticks) into all the useful teaching and learning materials necessary to be placed into working creative activity zones.

As we have already forged a relationship with the schools in Asuboi, especially the Asuboi Presbyterian School, ICRI has been offered an unfinished building to be used as the Resource Center. ICRI is always seeking the involvement of anyone interested in helping us to aid the wonderful children of Ghana.

tive for Children and the World Forum Foundation presented a new approach to conferences, where the work of many diverse disciplines blended into innovative designs for the children of three countries.

International Child Resource Institute's (ICRI) desire to develop an effective multi-service child care, family, and community center for the people of Asuboi, in the Eastern Region of Ghana, is still burning. At the Working Forum on Design and Nature, different groups consisting of early childhood educators, policymakers, architects, landscape architects, and environmental advocates proposed five different architectural designs to be considered and developed in Ghana. Ghana's team (including the

Cambodia's Samaky Community

by Chris Schooling, Samaky Foundation

Since the Designing Inspiring and Effective Spaces for Children Working Forum, Samaky Foundation has been busy digesting the fantastic designs that were developed. There are many aspects



of each design that could be incorporated together into one Early Childhood Centre design once a suitable land parcel is identified. While the detailed design and construction of an Early Childhood Centre is still at least 18 months away and dependent on receiving financial support, we are keen to finalize the programming aspects of both the future Early Childhood Program and the location and construction of the Centre.

In the meantime, we are trying to identify ways to fund the tenure of a site and construction of the Centre, which we have estimated to cost between US\$15,000 and US\$20,000 in total. This includes diversifying our existing, small fundraising base, and targeting new funding partnerships. We do not have the ability to fund an Early Childhood Program or Centre within our current fundraising base. We are particularly eager to secure sponsorship for the Early Childhood Program and Centre in the next 12 to 18 months, which will allow us to start programming development, site acquisition, construction, and staffing. We have started exploring options for the Early Childhood Program, including scoping membership of the Network of Early Childhood Care and Development in Cambodia, and potentially organizing observation

and training opportunities for our staff in Western Australia.

Australia's Mocca in Canberra

by Robby McGarvey

Kia Ora –

Haven't stopped reflecting on what a wonderful time we had in Rotorua. Thank you so much for giving Mocca the special privilege of being one of the project groups for Designing Inspiring and Effective Spaces for Young Children.

Aaron Knudsen and I both came back inspired, amazed, and totally humbled; myself tearful actually, joyful tears of gratitude firstly for the people who came to be part of such a extraordinary event, the friendships ignited and rekindled, and for me personally the honour of being side by side at the design table with the fantastic Kawakawa group.

At the end of the Working Forum, Aaron and I were not really believing it had happened, here we were gifted these beautiful designs to bring home, designed with mindfulness around Mocca's philosophy and belief, which acknowledged the *mana* (pride) of the Ngunnawal elders as the past, present, and future custodians of our local land upon which we pledge to look after the land,

people, animals, and plants, together keeping the land beautiful.

Each design captured flourishing outdoor areas that ensured every child and family would have a sense of place at Mocca where they could bring, share, and celebrate their own heritage, traditions, and belonging through welcoming community gardens for harvest, rocky-scapes, log-filled lush garden spaces for exploration, showcasing cultural connections and modes of expression such as murals, objects, artifacts — completely interwoven and connected to nature and natural spaces flowing from outdoor spaces to indoor places.

So Mocca is now holding these treasured designs close to our hearts, waiting to breathe life into them! Right now, the ACT Government has made a commitment to work with Mocca to help Mocca move from Flinders Way to Montgomery Oval via the services of a Business Consultant who will evaluate, plan, design, and assess Mocca's financial capabilities to be owner/occupier of a purpose-built 100-place centre. This report will also show the ACT Government what Mocca needs in the way of assistance.

At the end of May, we started our "I love Mocca" campaign to celebrate Mocca now and keep our culture and organisation firmly fixed in the hearts and minds of our community, to ensure Mocca's rightful position in the Manuka community as a high-quality nature inspired community-based not-for-profit Education and Care service forever here in the Inner South of Canberra.



Learn more and see the latest updates:
WorldForumFoundation.org/design2015

Global Gallery of Spaces for Children



Inside of a preschool classroom in a rural area – Bangladesh

There is no better stimulation than from the mother! – Bolivia



Childspace – New Zealand



Lu Nistou – Beaulieu sur Mer, France



At London Early Years Foundation, we use real fruit and vegetables in our role play areas.

Our children are the leaders for tomorrow – Jordan



This model program in Ghana emphasizes use of found materials to create spaces for play and learning.



Pine Grove School, Falmouth, Maine – United States

Xin Zhou – Suzhou, China



A children's room in an early childhood program. The structure is built from "Guadua," a big bamboo that we grow in Colombia. It has many attributes: being earthquake resistant, economical, beautiful, and very, very versatile. – Colombia

See more spaces for children from around the world and contribute your own!
worldforumfoundation.org/gallery-inspiring-spaces