

Building Challenging and Risky Learning Spaces with Four Year Olds



Mel Cox – Nominated Supervisor
Georgina Kelly – Educational Leader

Presenters

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Georgina Kelly – Educational Leader

Mel Cox is the Director for a one hundred place long day care centre in the rural town of Dubbo, New South Wales and this is Georgina Kelly our Educational Leader.

Play, Learn, Grow



Dubbo Early Learning Centre



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BE THE DIFFERENCE
FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

The back yard problem



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Our centre was part of a new community residential development to address a lack of childcare places in the town of Dubbo.



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A property developer quickly built the centre and outdoor environment that met regulations and standards.



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The back yard problem

Daily practice saw the equipment, usually simple climbing frames and bikes, removed from the shed and placed in the environment.



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At all times educators and children could clearly see the entire space and the play activities taking place.



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Children were not engaged in activities for long periods of time.



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They moved from one area to another continuously, and if a small group were engaged they would be disturbed by the ever moving mob of other children.



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The back yard problem

This was confirmed through observations that indicate children's ongoing movement around the space was contributing to a high incidence of injuries, often resulting from banged heads.



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Educators described their experience in the outdoor environment as exhausting and used the words 'crowd control' to highlight their actions.



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Solution Part 1

We started in the Babies and Toddlers back yard.



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We addressed the reality that not all early childhood environments are purposely designed for the care and education of children. We asked “can the outdoor setting facilitate belonging?”



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We created
activity
pockets



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With risky
elements



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We created high
walls children
couldn't see over



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Interesting spaces



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With a
maze



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Another activity pocket



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Spaces to hide



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Rocks to climb



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High risk climbing structures.



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Solution Part 2

The older yard for 3 to 5 year old children



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An outdoor setting that promoted conflict and frustration was remodelled and renovated using design principles and Clark's, A. (2010) participatory method to create a learning space for children to trial physical challenge and risk.

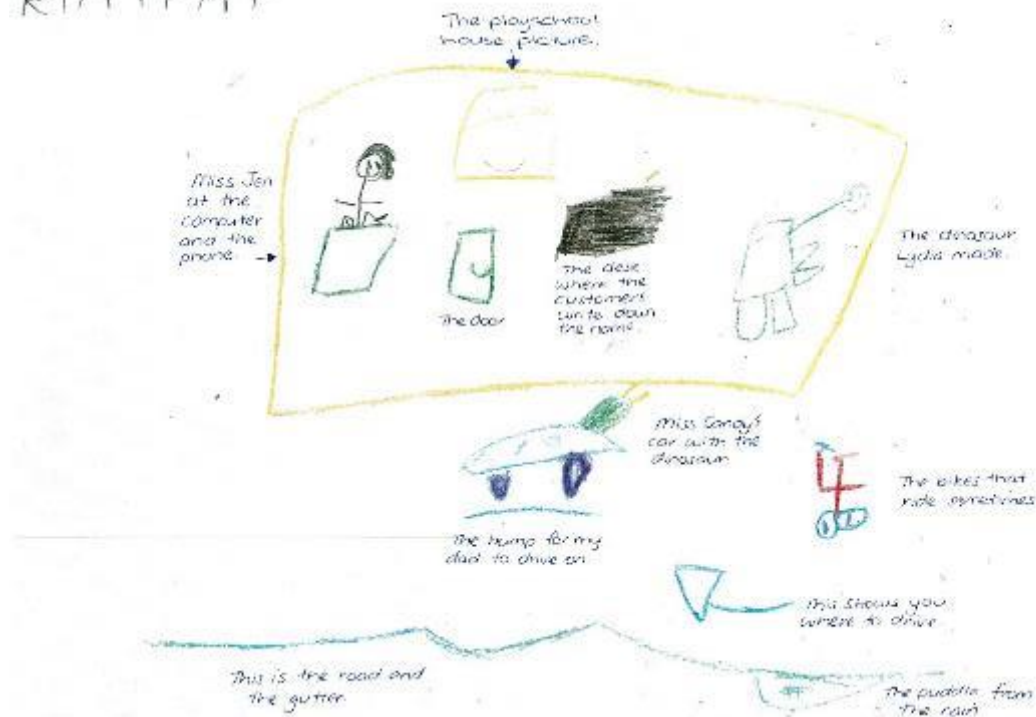


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The children generated many concept designs, followed by refinement and evaluation to determine the final design.



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The children
constructed the
maze and moved
the bark chip.



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During outside play, Brandi was walking around the playground and heard singing coming from the maze. As she approached the maze, there was Mia and Maddee (from Preschool.) She then found Ava and Jade both laying on the ground in different spots. She asked Ava and Jade why they were laying on the ground and they responded by telling Brandi that they had died during battle. Mia then told Brandi that she was singing because it was their funeral. The girls were very involved in their dramatic play.

A circular wooden maze with multiple paths, situated in a playroom. The maze is made of light-colored wood and is surrounded by a low wooden wall. The background shows a playroom with various toys and furniture.

The maze has increased self directed imaginary play



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Solution Part 3

The older yard for 3 to 5 year old children

The following year.



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Children and educators reflected upon the tyre tower in the younger children's yard and decided the older children needed a climbing structure.



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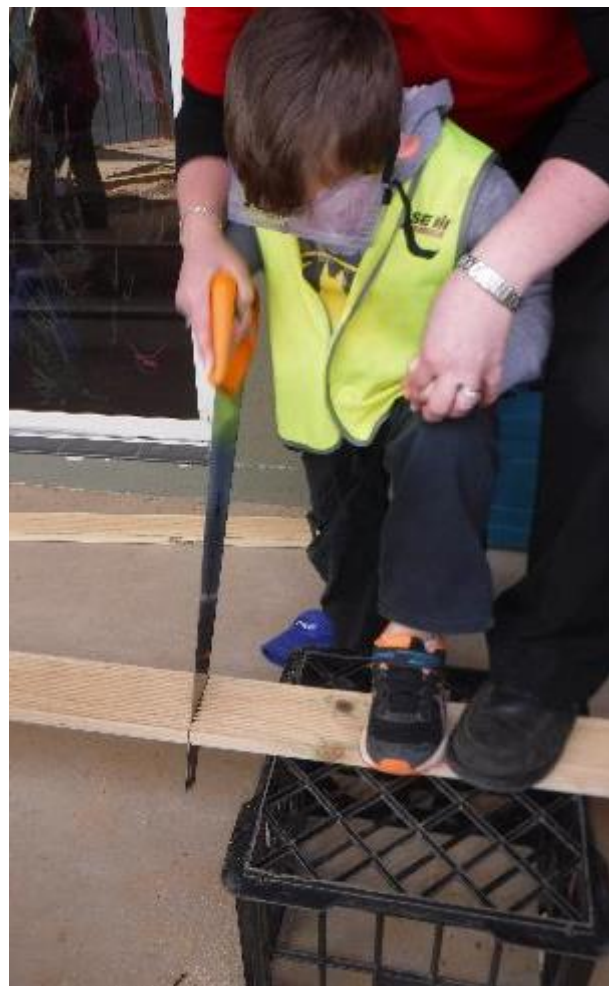
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When building, the children collaboratively learnt how to conceptualise, design, plan and construct. There were numerous opportunities to promote learning that engaged mathematical concepts including counting, measuring, sequencing, depth, size and angles.

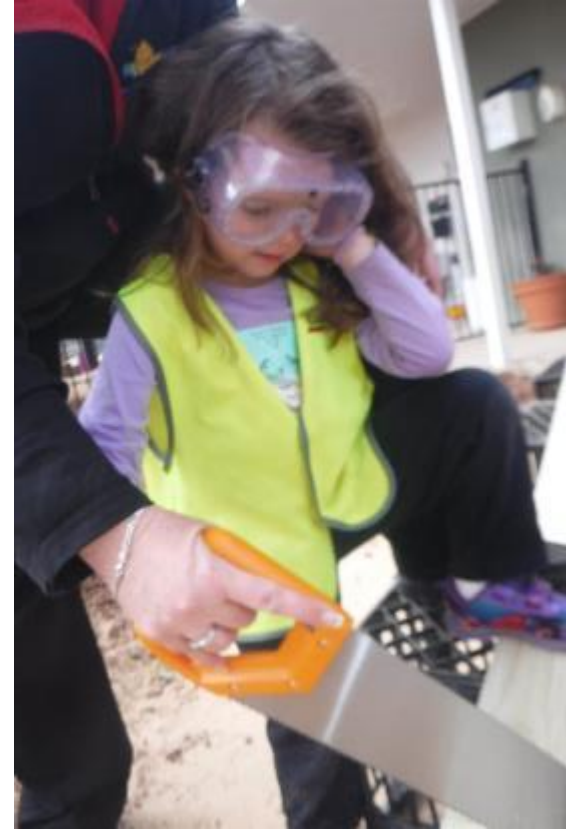




Families were pleased to see their children involved in 'real work' with a significant outcome. One parent said, "it's about time they learnt real things" in relation to the building process.



Educator's had barriers to overcome. Firstly, a lack of knowledge in building which families assisted with, by giving feedback and technical advice.



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Secondly, other Educators had both a perceived fear about what children were capable of and the potential risks involved in building and a real fear about the lack of prescription in the National Early Childhood Education and Care Regulations.



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For example, Educators commented that the Regulations didn't allow for such a risky structures when in fact they contain no explicit details.



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The children developed a risk benefit analysis and rules to follow when using their new playground. Showing leadership, they taught the three year olds who shared the learning space these rules.



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The new
structure's height
unexpectedly gave
children the
affordance to view
the immediate
community,



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which in turn has generated weekly excursions, for example to the battery wholesalers.



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Today we went on an excursion to Doherty Smith and Associates (local surveyors) to extend on our measuring that we learnt about from the Titanic. We all learnt more about land measuring and how to measure buildings and objects. “Who knows how to measure things?” asked Eric, “we measure things with a long tape” answered **Scarlette**. Eric then explained that to measure buildings and land they use a land surveyor.



Extending on the mathematical learning in the Preschool Room the children had an excursion to Crowe Horwath today where they were given a tour by Tash who explained to the children what financial planning was. The Preschool children were excited about building connections between the mathematical learning they had been focusing on and this local community business.



These excursions provide opportunities for Educators to extend learning and explore community protocols.



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What started as a hands-on project to help children develop their physical skills and trial risk led to the affordance of exploring the local community and expanding the learning environment beyond the service boundary.



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