



FAMILIES LOVE THRILLING AND SENSORY PLAYGROUNDS

A 7-day retention study of Veteran's Park playground,
Marple Township, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Families love thrilling and sensory playgrounds

By Suzanne Quinn, PhD; Signe Madsen, MSc;
Jeanette Fich Jespersen, MA, KOMPAN Play
Institute

Introduction

What is a playground “stay factor”? What makes a playground visited frequently from a user perspective? Play is recommended by the World Health Organization to increase physical activity for children. We know that active play is essential for children’s well-being. Playgrounds are outdoor community spaces designed to support active and social play. Playgrounds are central to children’s physical activity, and physical activity is central to children’s health and well-being. Some playgrounds seem to be more popular than others. So, what does it take to plan for popular playgrounds?

A study of playground success factors

Our study asked multiple questions to clarify the importance of the playground to the users:

We examined:

1. The satisfaction of the children who use the playground
2. The favourite play activities of the children
3. The perspectives of the parents on the playground features
4. The average time spent at the playground
5. The frequency of visits to the playground by the users
6. The age ranges of the playground use

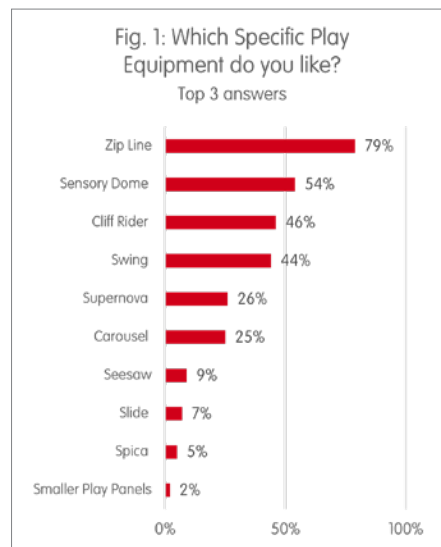
Methodology

This study investigated the retention of Veteran’s Park in Marple Township, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, four months after the grand opening of the renovated playground. 124 adults and 57 children were interviewed during seven days from 19 July to 25 July 2022.

The 1-hectare playground is located in a 11-hectare park that has ample parking, a 400-metre walking track around a sports field, a restroom and other activity spaces. The general conditions during the field work were sunny and hot, 35-36 degrees Celsius. The questionnaire was created online with close-ended as well as open-ended questions. A QR code was created and displayed at the playground. Parents could download the study to their phones using the QR code. Two researchers from the KOMPAN Play Institute were at the site every day from 8:00 to 20:00 and helped visitors to download the study. The researchers also assisted by conducting the study as an interview with the children and with some of the adults.

‘This is a great playground. We come here because of the equipment. Being able to take risks and work up your skills is important. This is the major draw for us and the reason why we come back.’

(Adult playground visitor)



Key findings

Park use increased by 90%

90% of the adults said they visit the playground more than before. This shows that the playground has stay factor. Before the installation of the new KOMPAN playground, 89% of the adults also declared that they remained at this playground with their children for more than 30 minutes per visit. The stay factor is important in order to support children in achieving the daily recommended amount of physical activity (180 minutes per day for children aged 3-5, and 60 minutes for children over the age of 5). The children love the new playground! All the children interviewed declared that they like the playground and would like to come back.



Sensory play and thrilling equipment are stay factors

When asked which equipment the children like the best, the Zip Line, the Sensory Dome and the Cliff Rider were the top three answers. They are all highly motivating, thrilling play features (see Fig. 1)

Thrill is a stay factor

88% of the adults interviewed stated that thrill is important and valuable. In addition, the children agreed that the playground gives them a thrill. It's the main attraction!

However, according to parents, thrills are not only important for child development, but they also contribute to the stay factor. A parent explained, 'When we first came to the playground, my child could not do the Cliff Rider, but now she can. This is great. You don't get that experience anywhere else. And this is free to the public.' Another parent said, 'This is great, the older children can take risks and they don't get bored. This is important at their age. Otherwise they don't want to come to a playground.' Another parent summed it up: 'This is the main reason why we come here. We're working up their courage and skills.'

Sensory play makes children stay

81% indicate that the unique sensory features of the playground were very important. Nevertheless, sensory play must be well designed for the unique needs of all ages and abilities. For example, a parent said 'I notice all of the different things, like in the rope net. It's more than just a rope net, there are so many other things in there for the senses. My teen children

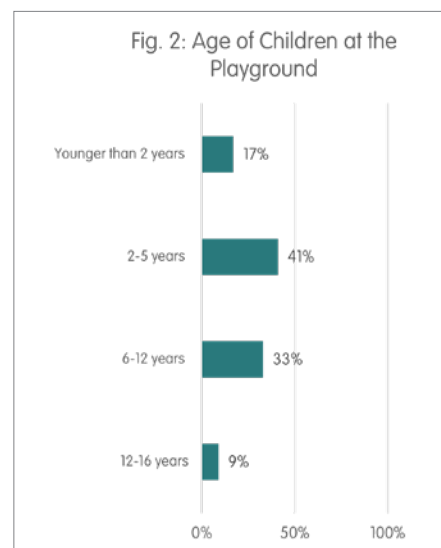
love it. It looks cool and there is so much to it.' Another parent commented, 'These things really work, they are not just there for the look of it. Especially for the younger children, the equipment has so many things they can touch and see.'

The playground is a social space for the children and the community

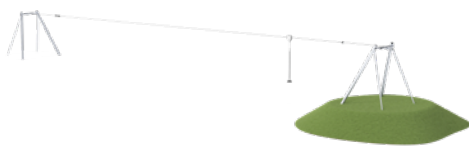
83% of the children said that they make friends at the playground. Our observations of the playground indicate that many parents and children alike come to the playground to socialise and meet with others on a regular basis. Most of the playground users were also from the local neighbourhood and visit the playground regularly. 64% of visitors travelled 3-8 kilometres to the playground, and 64% of the people used the playground once a week or more. In addition, all of the adults interviewed find playgrounds important for children.

Playground users are a range of ages

Our study found that 72% of the families who brought more than one child, brought children across different developmental age ranges listed in Fig. 2. Therefore, it is important to provide equipment for all age ranges. Playground equipment is designed to meet the developmental needs of children in specific age ranges. These are under the age of 2, ages 2-5, ages 5-12 and over age 12. Our study showed that the largest user group was children aged 2-5 (41%). However, children at this playground were from all age ranges (see Fig. 2)



Playground favourites:



Zip Line



Sensory Dome



Cliff Rider

5

Community playground design tips

1. Provide active and thrilling physical play activities (the feeling of speed, height, challenge and rough and tumble play).
2. Provide play activities that engage the senses (touch, sight and sound).
3. Make sure that activities are varied in their play functionality (gliding, climbing, spinning, swinging, rocking and sliding).
4. Provide spaces for children and adults to socialise (high-capacity play pieces with social points, as well as seating).
5. Create a safe and inclusive environment for all ages and all abilities.



Quotes from the study:

'When we first came to the playground, my child could not do the Cliff Rider, but now she can. This is great. You don't get that experience anywhere else. And this is free to the public.'

(Adult playground visitor)

'Using the Cliff Rider was a big moment for my son! He watched other children use it, we talked about how it works, and he was brave to try. Once he tried it, he wanted to use it again.'

(Adult playground visitor)



KOMPAN International Sales
C.F. Tietgens Boulevard 32C
5220 Odense SØ
Denmark
Tel.: +45 63 62 12 50
export@kompan.com
www.kompan.com