

Children's Preschool and Enrichment Center Playground Philosophy

Two events have had a major impact on the development of the preschool's philosophy on how best to serve children in the learning area of the playground. The first was when CPEC received a generous grant from IBM for the playground improvement project. This allowed us to replace the old fence with a more protective and appealing one, to install the riding path and blacktop the path from the door to the playground, to add a grassy area and to construct the raised beds for gardening. This work gave the playground an appeal that is both inviting and environmentally pleasing.

The second, and perhaps more significant, event came when the state licensor advised us that we could not use the climbing/swing structure when the ground was frozen because during that time there was not adequate cushioning beneath. Essentially, that meant that we could not use about a quarter of the playground from November to April. It was frustrating for the children to have the swings and slides visible but not useable. Therefore, we made the hard decision to remove them and open up the space. An amazing thing happened. Immediately upon the removal of the swings and slides, the children became industrious, cooperative, engaged and creative in ways we hadn't seen up to then. An example of how the children carry on the industry; as a whole they started a rock collection with which they have lined the cross pieces of the fence to an amazing effect. We are encouraged in our decision and have worked out a philosophy to support this kind of play, and which we now refer to as "loose parts".

The staff has continued to provide additional materials and learning centers as time has gone by. In the storage units are the usual sand toys, trucks, wood, chalk, bubbles, dress-up clothes, rings, dolls, beanbag toss, dishes, construction tools, art supplies, and such. Always out are pipes and child-sized furniture. We have a board for magnet play, a 4x8 foot chalkboard, a workbench, a tunnel, a music wall, a whispering tube, an art easel, a large sand box, a CPEC theater, and a kitchen area. In the barn, we have scooters, trikes, wagons, and other wheeled vehicles plus helmets for safety. We have the raised beds for gardening, of course, and a composter, as well as a vegetable stand, which was built and donated by a former CPEC family. In the warmer weather, we do water play in the sensory table, and sometimes with sprinklers.

So, while the playground may not look like the traditional playground with swings and slides, what happens on the playground is all that we hope to provide for children: opportunities to reflect their understanding of the world in creative and fun ways, the art of playing with others and working out relationships and differences, experiencing the child-like wonder of finding out about the physical properties of sand, stone, water, gravity and other natural materials, learning about the life cycle of plants, animals, and insects, testing their bodies for flexibility and endurance, expressing themselves creatively in movement and dress-up and art, and learning how to live in community while being responsible for the care of their play space and their playmates.

In all these ways, the CPEC playground supports our field's best practices.