

LET'S HACK OUR PLAY!

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STREET PERFORMANCE POLICIES

Current playgrounds are mostly bought off a catalogue, resulting in cookie-cutter and standardised play experiences. Given the importance of play in a child's development, we believe that there is a need to rethink how we design and build play spaces in Singapore. Particularly, we believe that children, educators, and parents should be included in the process of designing play spaces so that each play space can become a tailor-made experience that meets their own needs and learning objectives.

Hack Our Play (HOP) is Singapore's first participatory, community-built play space at St. James' Church Kindergarten (SJCK).

It is an initiative that lets children, educators, and parents co-create their very own play space, from start to finish. Together, they will be able to conceive, create and curate a safe and unique play experience while also fostering stronger bonds, greater community investment and a sense of pride and excitement through the process. This new model of play space design demonstrates how a play space can be created and transformed by everyone who uses it. The use of non-standard structures,



Boy planting for the new play space (cocreation workshop)



Kids sharing with their teachers what they like



Volunteers and parents at the cocreation workshop

recyclables, and everyday materials in its construction not only encourages non-linear thinking but also allows the HOP play space to be reconfigured and evolve over time.

SUGGESTIONS FOR STREET PERFORMANCE POLICIES

Dialogue and interaction between buskers and policy makers will work best if busking is approached as an asset to be encouraged rather than a problem to be solved. To get the best busking talent, cities must make the best buskers want to work there.

To achieve this, busking policies and guidelines should be developed in cooperation with the city's busking community. Properly implemented, a best practices guide for busking can be hugely rewarding for all concerned. Astute authorities will leverage their cities' reputation as busking hotspots in order to boost their cultural capital.

A common complaint is that failing city centres are moribund while commercially successful ones are becoming homogenised. A vivid street-performing scene can draw people into city centres and encourage them to spend time there. A lively scene can demonstrate the culture or character of that city and differentiate it from its competitors.

THE PARTICIPATORY DESIGN PROCESS FOR HOP

We started with discovering and building relationships with people who are experts in the landscape of play, thorough literature review, case studies research and expert interviews. We interviewed play experts, educators, parents, and children to gather insights on play and its landscape in Singapore.

The typical process of creating a playground usually involves children in the last stage, as users. We wanted to begin with children and the community that surrounds them. To gain a deeper understanding of the needs, challenges and opportunities with users of play spaces, we held engagement activities such as Crayon Conversations, One-day Pop-Up Play and Field Observations of the current playgrounds in Singapore. Through a series of curated and facilitated workshops, children, parents, educators, and

BENEFITS OF HOP

The children's learning is enhanced in several ways. They

- Develop creative thinking and hands-on construction as they explore play possibilities with structures and materials not commonly found in regular playgrounds
- Learn to construct, deconstruct, reconstruct, solve problems, and take ownership of the play space
- Foster the skills of collaboration as they co-create with peers and subsequent users of the space
- Learn about the impermanence of life/situations/materials as the HOP space keeps changing and materials respond to wear and tear
- Gain skills to adapt to today's speed of change and disruption, as well as skills for the future

Educators and parents enhance their teaching and parenting skills as they help to extend the children's learning and development of ideas through play in the HOP space.

For example, they:

- Observe the children's responses to the "invitation" to create, and use these observations to enhance the children's learning
- Facilitate/support the children's learning by continually engaging them through play

volunteers helped to build components of the play space by painting tyres, placing burlap on barrels, painting pots and pans, and planting greenery.

WHAT DO CHILDREN WANT IN THEIR PLAY SPACE?

HOP asked children and parents from SJCK, as well as members of the public what they value most in a play space and play environment. The children preferred spaces that let them play comfortably in groups or alone. They loved colours and wanted to have the freedom to choose what to play and how to play. They also wished for spaces where they could indulge in their fantasies and imagination.

Parents wanted a balance of nature and man-made elements, as well as sensorial stimulation in play spaces that were safe yet challenging, where they could play with their children. They also appreciated areas for them to rest comfortably.

With this in mind, the HOP play space is designed to ‘evolve’ into what the children want it to be. It has loose elements for children to build upon, and its green wall integrates nature into the play area. The mix of fixed structures and loose elements provides a variety of play and rest spaces for children and accompanying adults.

The design also reflects input from experts, including architects, designers, playground suppliers and early childhood educators on technical and safety aspects and how to encourage different types of play behaviour.



Kids playing with the barrels

COMPARISON OF HOP PLAY SPACE AND REGULAR PLAYGROUND

REGULAR PLAYGROUND Creation process	REGULAR PLAYGROUND Designers and experts choose the outcome. Children, as main users, are <u>not</u> part of the design development. They are consumers of the end product.	HOP PLAY SPACE Participatory design: Play space is co-developed/co-created with children/educators/parents from start to finish, making the process as important as the product. The benefits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Children, educators and parents become collaborators, not just consumers – Recognition that every child has something positive to contribute to the process – Stronger bonds in the community, greater community investment – Children/educators have ownership over the space, as well as a sense of excitement and accomplishment
Materials	Built from scratch from new raw materials	Built from everyday recyclable/used materials: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Recycled - less waste/using what already exists instead of making something new. Children learn the importance of caring for the environment – Children are encouraged to be creative as they are given freedom to construct, deconstruct and reconstruct
Learning for children/educators/parents	Fixed structures and predictable materials offer fewer avenues for creativity and therefore can limit learning	Brings learning to broader and deeper levels for both children and educators/parents

Hack our Play is presented by Lien Foundation and Participate in Design and in collaboration with St. James' Church Kindergarten.