

# Playscape

a natural playground in Sunnyside, Pretoria

by Elize Meyer

PLAYSCAPE  
A natural playground in the city.

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in the  
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## Project summary

Programme: A natural playground

Site description: Vacant erven next to the Walker Spruit

Client: The City of Tshwane

Users: The children and larger community of Sunnyside

Site Location: Erven 708, R/709, R/1/709, R/2/709, R/3/709 and R/6/1201, Sunnyside

Address: c/o Bourke Street and De Rapper Street, Sunnyside, Pretoria, South Africa

GPS Coordinates: 25°45'5.28"S, 28°13'36.28"E

Architectural Theoretical Premise: Environmental psychology

Architectural Approach: Developing a natural playground (playscape) in the high-density residential area of Sunnyside

Research field: Urbanism and human settlements

In accordance with Regulation 4(e) of the General Regulations (G.57) for dissertations and theses, I declare that this thesis, which I hereby submit for the degree Master of Landscape Architecture (Professional) at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

I further state that no part of my thesis has already been, or is currently being, submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification.

I further declare that this thesis is substantially my own work. Where reference is made to the works of others, the extent to which that work has been used is indicated and fully acknowledged in the text and list of references.

The dissertation is 24 692 words long.

Elize Meyer

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## Abstract

**Keywords:** high-density residential area, natural, playscape, socio-emotional, physical and cognitive development

Quality play is fundamental to the healthy development of a child. Children living in high-density residential areas in Pretoria are deprived of necessary play experiences, due to the nature of the existing playgrounds.

This dissertation investigates why interaction with nature is beneficial to children, and how a playscape (natural playground) can be designed in such a way as to facilitate the social, emotional, cognitive and physical development of children.

The research argues that quality play is possible when children have loose parts to play with, and are able to manipulate their environment. Playing in more natural areas offers a host of physical and psychological health benefits for children.

A playscape is therefore proposed in the high-density residential area of Sunnyside in Pretoria along the Walker Spruit, to serve the play needs of the children in the area, incorporating a toy library and other economic initiatives. The design solution aims at creating a safe park which would be used by all members of the public, not only children. The proposal shows that employing natural materials in a play area could provide healthy, stimulating play opportunities for children.

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## Terminology

**Adventure playground:** a playground where children are allowed to build their own constructions without adult interference, but guidance when asked. Planks and other construction materials together with tools such as hammers and nails are available for use by the children.

**Child:** in the context of this dissertation, the word denotes any child from birth to thirteen years of age.

**Conventional playground:** a playground with standardized, catalogue play equipment such as steel climbing frames, see-saws, merry-go-rounds, and swings. The surface is usually hard (concrete, asphalt or bare soil).

**High-rise:** in the South African context, a high-rise residential block of flats includes all buildings from 4 storeys and higher.

**Junk playground:** similar to adventure playground. Discarded items such as planks, tyres, and broken pieces of furniture are freely available for the children to play with.

**Nature:** all the elements, forces and events of the biophysical world which are not controlled by man.

**Natural (area):** in the context of this dissertation this does not mean an area in a virgin state before man interfered, but rather an area consisting mostly out of natural materials and incorporating natural materials as far as possible, whilst not excluding man-made elements completely.

**Natural playground:** a playground consisting of mostly natural elements such as woodland, forest, boulders, streams or mounds, with few man-made interventions.

**Playscape:** see natural playground

**Standard playground:** see conventional playground

**Sense of community:** MacMillan and Chavis (date: 1955) assert that a sense of community is formed when residents experience “membership, influence, sharing of values and shared emotional connections”. Sarason (1974:157) defines it as “the perception of similarity to others, and acknowledged interdependence with others, a willingness to maintain this interdependence by giving to or doing to others what one expects from them, the feeling that one is part of a larger and dependable structure.” It is the opinion of the author that a sense of community is also determined by the amount of people a person “knows” (either from personal communication with other residents, or from seeing them every day, without necessarily interacting with them).

**Teenager:** in the context of this dissertation teenager implies any person from the age of thirteen to eighteen years old.

**Threshold:** thresholds are not barriers but rather transitional spaces, places of waiting, rest or anticipation, defining entrances or exits, and visually or physically linking spaces.