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# Introduction

child·hood [chīld'hud']

*noun*

- The time or state of being a child.
- The early stage in the existence or development
- a human between the stages of birth and puberty

[<http://www.answers.com/topic/childhood>]

With the proposal to increase housing in the framework for Pretoria's city and, in a bid to densify the urban centre, comes the added responsibility to accommodate the youngest generations of city dwellers. We live in an era where, in numerous households, both parents are required to work and where there is the growing phenomenon of single parent households either due to the AIDS pandemic or separation. In many cases the children are left alone without adult supervision to fend for and entertain themselves.

It is with this in mind that I propose to design a **pre-primary school [private] after-school care [private], playground [public], and associated utilities**. This facility will accommodate the needs of the working caretaker by supporting and formalising the existing informal childcare structure composing of: taking the child with to the place of work or leaving the child in the care of family members or friends.

The north and north-western quadrants of Pretoria have been identified as requiring attention for rejuvenation. The framework looks at **“connectivity through activity”** and the site ties into the creative industries, heritage route and pedestrian walkway proposed for the area. It is realised that in these days of rapidly escalating land and building costs, the ideal is often impossible to achieve. Paradoxically too it is often in the more densely populated areas, where land values are highest that

there is the greatest need for ample space for children, whose probable home is a cramped flat, with no garden in which to run about and play freely.

Although extensive studies have been carried out and documented on the effects of learning through play and optimum conditions for education, schools in Pretoria still lack successful implementations of these strategies. A new revolutionary approach to educational buildings has to be investigated in terms of **“learning through play”** to accommodate development in research. The pre-primary school should complement the home experience of young children and form a link between home and the wider environment of the pre-primary school. The ages of the children will vary between three and six years [day-care] and six upwards [after-school care]. This is the period when their enquiring minds will constantly be searching for new experiences. The school should provide a challenging environment for investigation and effort. They will rapidly be developing their social, cognitive and language skills and here they will have the opportunity for the companionship of other children as well as healthy relationships with adults other than their parents. The importance of play in the development of young children cannot be over-emphasised and at pre-primary school they should have the opportunity of experiencing a much wider range of play activities, both indoors and out, than is possible at any home [Natal Education Department 1979].



figure 1.2



figure 1.3



figure 1.4



figure 1.5



figure 1.6

The “Commissioner of Parks in New York City who reportedly stated, when asked his opinion of the standard playground that the Parks Department had been constructing for over thirty years, that what had been good enough for him was good enough for today’s children” [Dattner 1974: 20]. This naive attitude is still apparent to this day and can be related to education and the pre-primary building typology. As a result children are not fully prepared for primary schooling.

Previous proposals fail to acknowledge and establish links between inside and outside to their detriment. One should not design a building on a site but rather aim to design the site in totality as an inter-operational entity. **The transition from the public-to-private realms, playground-to-building, outside-to-inside and formal-to-informal** needs to be determined through a careful integration of landscape and architecture where the in-between zones and interfaces are scrutinised. Educational facilities, offering an alternative more creative edification, ought to be innovative in their design in order to best encourage growing and inquisitive minds.

“Several years ago two 350 pound gorillas were turned loose on a new set of swings in Central Park. When it was found that the animals did not destroy the equipment, the playground was pronounced fit for New York City’s children...The simplest maintenance measure, to be sure, would have been to exclude children, but that was clearly an Utopian solution...This kind of playground conforms to the requirements of administrators – it is simple to build, indestructible, and noncontroversial” [Dattner 1974: 35-36].

*If a design is successful “it is to the extent that the designers have listened to that which is playful in children, and in themselves.”*

*-Richard Dattner*