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The Child's Right to Play

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the Child's Right to Play*

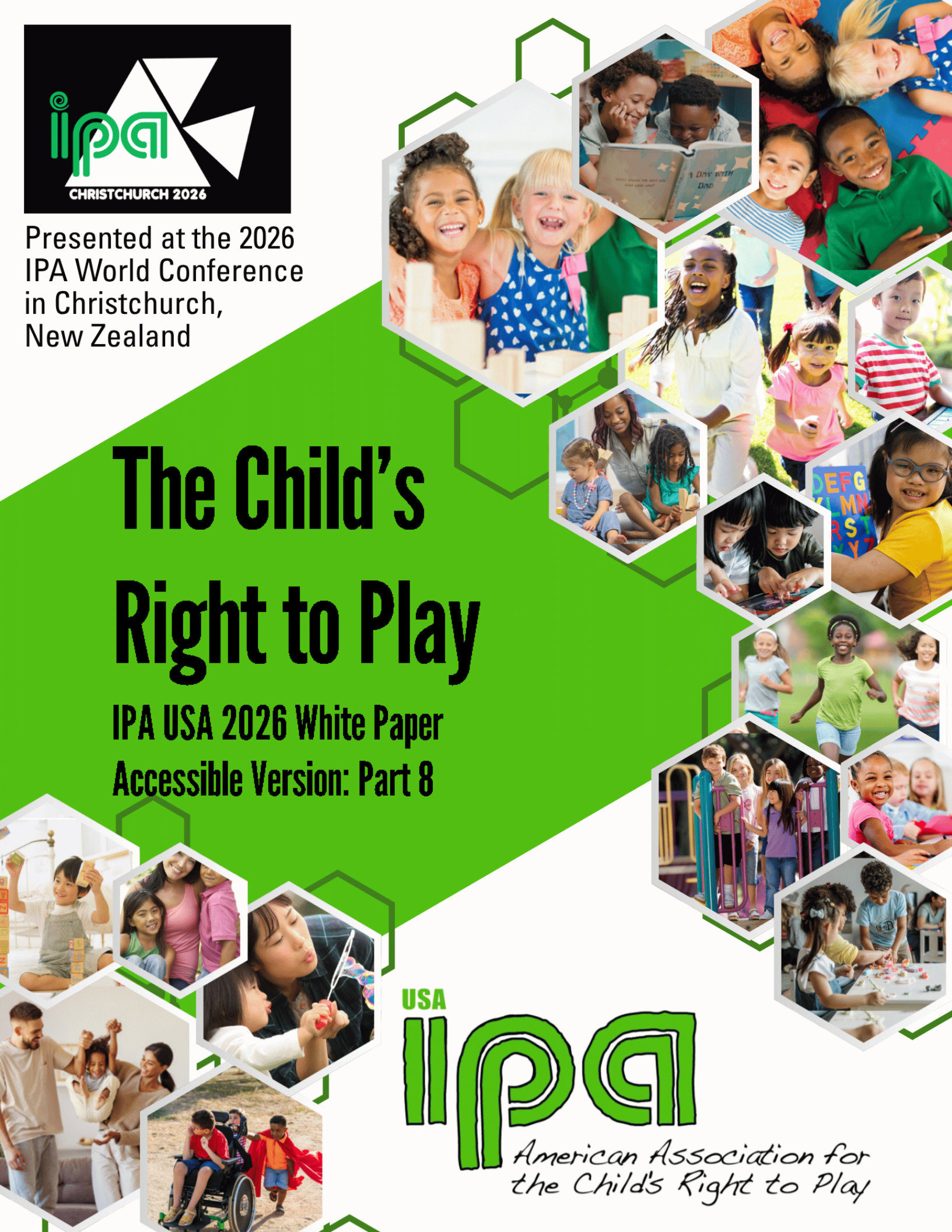


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Executive Summaries

Executive Summaries are organized by category, followed by author.



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Play and Climate Change

Climate change is reshaping the environments in which children live, learn, and play. Rising temperatures, extreme weather events, urbanization, environmental degradation, and the loss of natural play spaces increasingly affect children's opportunities for outdoor play and connection with nature. At the same time, communities worldwide are developing innovative approaches to create sustainable, accessible, and resilient play environments. The articles in this category explore the relationship between climate change and children's play experiences while highlighting practical solutions that support both environmental sustainability and the child's right to play. From using recycled and upcycled materials to community advocacy and policy initiatives, these authors offer research, examples, and strategies to help readers protect children's opportunities for play while contributing to a healthier, more sustainable future for all.

Authors

Upcycled Materials for Play Equipment to Expand the Benefit of Playing in Nature in Urban Areas

Ananta Hari Noorsasetya, PhD; Anna Sutanto, MEM; & Veronica Purwaningsih, LLB

The Impact of Environmental Changes on Children's Play Experiences

Ridhi Sethi, PhD Human Development, MSc Child Development, MEd

The Taiwan Children's Play Declaration and Protocol for Replication

Wei Shun Tseng, OT; Jen Hsiu-Chuan Wang; Xiang-Ru Lin, LLB; Eugenia Lin; & Elsie
Shih-Hua Chang

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Introduction

While many Indonesian cities claim to be child-friendly, play equipment and playgrounds remain limited in number and access. In general, two types of playgrounds are available in Indonesia's urban areas. First, privatized playgrounds are either in outdoor fenced areas or inside air-conditioned rooms, accessible by ticket or membership. Second, public playgrounds are located in green outdoor spaces or as part of public facilities. While public playgrounds are widely accessible, many have inadequate play equipment and limited opportunities to interact with nature because of constricted space and resources, concerns about changing weather, and the practicality of “clean” play (Shafira & Pramitasari, 2024; Tiara & Dwiputri, 2025).

While Dankiw et al. (2023) define nature play as playing activities in an outdoor setting with opportunities to interact with nature elements (e.g., water, soil, leaves); we propose that nature play also includes utilizing what is available in the surrounding area of the green space. In addition to standard play equipment, selected upcycled materials could be redesigned as permanent or pop-up play equipment, inspiring other possibilities for playing in nature.

Conclusion & Recommendations

In creating child-friendly cities and communities, nature play is limitedly fostered in Indonesia. Often, nature play occurs in a controlled environment where nature is a mere background for shade and views, without nature elements being part of the play activity.

To address this, we proposed a middle ground that responds to concerns about safety, resources, and cleanliness in nature play by harnessing upcycled materials from the surrounding area to create additional, customizable play equipment and expand the benefits of playing in nature. In addition, upcycled tires are an excellent option for landing beds that prioritize safety.

The design incorporates elements of nature as a bridge to build familiarity with nature. The three proposed basic designs described here serve as a starting point for further development based on material discoveries and suggestions from parents, children, and future designers.

The Impact of Environmental Changes on Children's Play Experiences

Ridhi Sethi, PhD Human Development, MSc Child Development, MEd

Introduction

Play happens naturally for children and opens their world by stimulating their imagination. Play provides us with a joyful way to connect with, relate to, and interact with the world. A child's healthy development depends on play. It makes learning fun while fostering moral, social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development. Regular playtime helps children grow into competent, self-assured, well-rounded adults. Regular play and exercise are essential for children's development and have many advantages, from better mental and social skills to better physical health (Berk et al., 2006).

Early childhood development is built on play, and having the opportunity to play is a fundamental human need. For children, it is seen as a fundamental right. From a child development perspective, outdoor play is characterized by flexibility, inventiveness, spontaneity, intrinsic drive, and nonliteral or symbolic use of items (Bäckström et al., 2024). Current outdoor trends in early childhood education indicate that these spaces are becoming increasingly bereft of opportunities to experience nature, despite abundant evidence of nature's importance to children's well-being (Dowdell et al., 2011). When used as learning spaces, outdoor spaces can give children the freedom to use their bodies and imaginations to create, invent, and change their surroundings. Additionally, natural materials offer children many opportunities for creative play (Kiewra and Veselack, 2016). They emphasized that young children must experience things firsthand, digest knowledge in ways that suit them, grapple with issues, and develop original, creative solutions to learn (Kiewra and Veselack, 2016).

Today, nearly every child faces at least one of the following climate risks: sand and dust storms, tropical storms, riverine floods, drought, high heat, fire, and heatwaves. At least three overlapping climate threats endanger the health, education, and survival of 1.1 billion children worldwide. Up to six overlapping hazards affect nearly 4 million children worldwide. The paper also examines children's exposure to climate-sensitive risks, including air pollution and vector-borne illnesses such as malaria (UNICEF, 2026).

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Conclusion

Children are especially vulnerable to climate change. Schools frequently close and playgrounds vanish during floods. When youngsters should be studying and playing with friends, they spend weeks indoors, miss school, and lose their routine. Climate change is also affecting their sense of security and childhood, as well as their immediate surroundings. To protect children from the effects of climate change and air pollution, we must prioritise their environmental health. UNICEF cautions that we are already witnessing changes in children's health and communities in a climate-changed world.

The desirability and viability of outdoor learning are influenced by various contexts and conditions worldwide. Numerous contextual elements, such as weather, culture, safety, and the availability of nearby outdoor spaces, shape its practice (Kiviranta et al., 2024).

In the era of climate change, supporting children's play requires balancing environmental protection with its positive developmental benefits. Educators, families, legislators, and communities should implement measures to foster safer, more resilient, and more adaptive play environments rather than limiting outdoor play (UNICEF, 2026). Governments must introduce a wide range of measures to ensure the fulfillment of all Article 31 rights, and to ensure that children's experience of place informs decision-making. Children need to be at the heart of the global response.

Play areas that are climate-resilient should be accessible, safe, and entertaining even amid shifting weather. Incorporating natural shade through trees and vegetation, offering covered outdoor areas and shelters, and utilizing a variety of natural elements like gardens, logs, rocks, and loose parts that promote different types of play and improve kids' interaction with nature are all ways to accomplish this (Kiviranta et al., 2024; Ramsden et al., 2025). To reduce the effects of heat stress and flooding while allowing kids to play outside safely, outdoor environments in areas with rising temperatures and extreme weather events should also incorporate climate-adaptive design elements like heat-reducing surfaces, permeable materials, and enhanced drainage systems (Lee et al., 2025; UNICEF, 2026).

The Taiwan Children's Play Declaration and Protocol for Replication

Wei Shun Tseng, OT; Jen Hsiu-Chuan Wang; Xiang-Ru Lin, LLB;
Eugenia Lin; & Elsie Shih-Hua Chang

Introduction

Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states that "children have the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts" (UNCRC, 1989).

Because of their age, children are still trying to understand the world and explore themselves. No one must overlook their inherent rights. Children's right to rest and play should be equally prioritized. Outside school and home hours, children should be allowed to engage in physical activity and play that suit their interests and allow them to socialize with their peers.

The fourth edition of the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework: Domain and Process is an official document of the American Occupational Therapy Association. (Occupations are the activities people engage in every day to give their lives meaning and purpose. Occupations can be done alone or with family members and friends; occupations can be done at home, at work or school, and in the community.

Every individual should participate in purposeful, meaningful activities that promote physical and mental health and overall quality of life. These activities should be emphasized across nine key occupations that evolve with age: activities of daily living, play, social participation, rest and sleep, work, education, health management, and others. Among these, the Play & Leisure domain is especially critical for children and adolescents. Play is an essential part of children's lives, serving as the most natural means of communication, self-discovery, emotional expression, and exploration of the world.

Play Taiwan was officially registered as a non-profit organization in 2017. A group of parents concerned about children's play spontaneously initiated a revolution across Taiwan, advocating for the most fun activities and playground changes. Through

their actions, they aim to amplify children's voices and ensure more people hear them. We prioritize policies and legislation for children's play and safeguard children's right to play, supporting a childhood filled with unrestricted play.

To ensure children's right to play and the time they need to play, we must understand their needs and listen to their voices. This aligns with Article 12-1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which asserts that "the child who is capable of forming his or her own views has the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child" (UNCRC, 1989). In recent years, playground and park design, urban planning, and policy in many countries have begun to prioritize children's participation by actively listening to their needs and opinions.

Recommendations

From Research to Policy: Expert Policy Translation.

We consulted five experts from landscape design, an environmental NGO, a pediatrician, and human rights organizations who provided technical expertise to translate children's voices into feasible policy recommendations.

1. Promoting Unstructured Play

The intensity of advocacy targeting parents regarding the significance and benefits of unstructured play should be reinforced, comparable to the promotional efforts of public health campaigns (e.g., "5 A Day"). Furthermore, the core benefit of play, articulated as "Potential Development Originates in Play," should be officially integrated into a Parenting and Children's Health Handbook (or equivalent governmental guidance documents).

2. Enhancing Play Time and Framework

The guarantee of playtime and activities must be increased to ensure that after-school programs allocate sufficient time for activities, exercise, and free play. In parallel with the "After-School Sports Programs" model, "After-School Play Programs" should be established.

3. Safeguarding Recess Time

It is essential to guarantee that children are afforded a full and uninterrupted recess time following every instructional session.

4. Modifying Physical Activity Curricula

Revise existing school physical activity initiatives (e.g., the Sport & Health 150 Policy in Taiwan) to explicitly include diverse play activities as a key component, rather than focusing exclusively on structured exercises such as running and jump rope.

5. Mandating and Auditing School Playground Provision

Establishing two distinct playgrounds in Primary and Secondary Schools—one for upper/middle grades and one for lower grades, designed to accommodate children's developmental needs and promote age-appropriate segregation —requires a rigorous audit of implementation status. This is crucial to ensure children have access to adequate and appropriate recreational space.

6. Assessing and Optimizing On-Campus Play Accessibility

Conduct a comprehensive inventory of on-campus play. Strategies such as converting underutilized classrooms into multi-functional play spaces should be pursued to expand opportunities for children, particularly those housed on upper floors, to engage in physical activity outside the classroom.

7. Inventorying Temporary Play Streets in School Zones

Pilot an assessment of the feasibility of temporarily converting the operational hours of School Access Routes across various municipalities into play streets. This initiative aims to increase access to play spaces and playmates, drawing on the "Streets for Kids" program developed by the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) in America.

8. Addressing Climate Change Impacts on Play

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment No. 26, issued on August 22, 2023, asserts that climate and environmental degradation compromise

children's rights to engage in outdoor activities and interact with the natural environment. The government must adopt proactive measures, including installing cooling infrastructure, such as shading and water play facilities, to safeguard children's rights to health and play.

9. Institutionalizing Child and Youth Participation in Play Design

To align with the general principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child—specifically the "Best Interests of the Child" and the Right to Express Views—it is imperative to develop "Child and Youth Participation Design Guidelines" and accompanying training programs. The objective is to institutionalize child participation in the creation of play spaces that are optimally suited to children's physical and mental developmental needs.

The Taiwan Children's Play Declaration is a landmark, child-led advocacy initiative fundamentally championing the right to play as an essential human right for every child. Co-created by children and the dedicated organization Taiwan Parks and Playgrounds for Children by Children, the Declaration is a powerful instrument that reflects the genuine voices, distinct needs, and lived perspectives of children across the nation.

Their collective ideas were meticulously shaped into a Declaration that not only issues a firm demand for action but also inspires a necessary paradigm shift toward a more inclusive, child-centered approach in urban planning, education, and policymaking.

White Papers



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Play and Climate Change

[Upcycled Materials for Play Equipment to Expand the Benefit of Playing in Nature in Urban Areas](#)

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Introduction

While many Indonesian cities claim to be child-friendly, play equipment and playgrounds remain limited in number and access. In general, two types of playgrounds are available in Indonesia's urban areas. First, privatized playgrounds are either in outdoor fenced areas or inside air-conditioned rooms, accessible by ticket or membership. Second, public playgrounds are located in green outdoor spaces or as part of public facilities. While public playgrounds are widely accessible, many have inadequate play equipment and limited opportunities to interact with nature because of constricted space and resources, concerns about changing weather, and the practicality of “clean” play (Shafira & Pramitasari, 2024; Tiara & Dwiputri, 2025).

While Dankiw et al. (2023) define nature play as playing activities in an outdoor setting with opportunities to interact with nature elements (e.g., water, soil, leaves); we propose that nature play also includes utilizing what is available in the surrounding area of the green space. In addition to standard play equipment, selected upcycled materials could be redesigned as permanent or pop-up play equipment, inspiring other possibilities for playing in nature.

Problem Statement

To support Indonesian cities in becoming more child-friendly, we need to ensure play experiences are supported and maximized in terms of accessibility for further interaction with nature. This can be done through two pathways.

1. Redefine the concept of playing with nature in urban green spaces.
2. Enrich play experiences in urban areas through upcycled equipment and pop-up play equipment made from natural materials.

Background

Indonesia is targeting 2030 as the year to achieve child-friendly cities and subdistricts. One requirement for a child-friendly city is ensuring children's right to play in a supportive environment, either natural or constructed.

According to the Child-Friendly Play Space (CFPS; RBRA in Indonesia) guidebook, published by the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, the principles of CFPS include free access, non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, child participation, safety, comfort, creativity and innovation, and health and protection, although the latter remains largely at the level of policy discourse (Deputi Bidang Pemenuhan Hak Anak, 2021). In line with this idea, we recommend using upcycled materials in playground design. The guidebook requirements suggest materials should be durable, toxin-free, affordable, and locally available (RBRA Guidelines, 2021).

To develop the idea, we observed three public spaces in Yogyakarta. The first two were inspired by the research of Shafira & Pramitasari (2024), while the third was selected because of its proximity to one of the author's daily routes.

Yogyakarta is the mini-Indonesia, located on the south coast of Central Java. Yogyakarta was selected because it is known for its creativity, with a large university student population from across Indonesia, relatively high community participation, a widely embraced slower pace of life, and numerous green spaces ripe for further development of play equipment.

These three public spaces have limited play equipment or limited interaction with nature and represent different playgrounds across urban Indonesian landscapes. This white paper prioritizes expanding the definitions and described benefits of playing in urban areas, where the limitations of different outdoor play spaces become additional advantages that support creativity.

Table 1***Summary of the Selected Playgrounds***

Name of Park	Brief Description of Location	Accessibility	Interaction with Nature
Bakung	- Public green space 700 M² - jogging track - gazebo	Surrounded by residential area	4 play equipment pieces - Adequately shaded by large trees - some grass and soil surfaces
Rejowinangun	- Public green space 660 M² - badminton court - community meeting hall	- Strategically located - free entrance	- Limited vegetation - no play equipment - mostly concrete surfaces
Pakuncen	- Community open space - outdoor and indoor space	Located in an urban village	- Limited vegetation 3 pieces of play equipment - concrete surfaces

We also believe pictures speak louder than words; therefore, we provide further descriptions of each location in the figures below.

Figure 1***Bakung Park******Bakung Park***

Source: Aldi Thursha

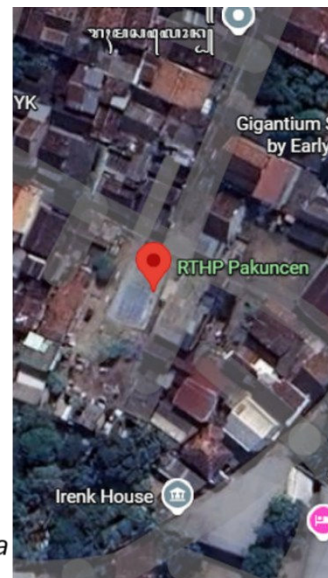


Figure 2*Rejowinangun Green Space*

Rejowinangun Green Space
Source: R Kakung Wahyu W

**Figure 3***Pakuncen Green Space*

Pakuncen Green Space
Source: Rio Ananda Adriana

**Appropriate Approaches & Strategies**

Over the past 20 years, children's play has shifted from activities that require movement and exploration to more sedentary, predictable activities, whether playing computer games or spending time at the playground (Fjørtoft, 2001).

How a playground is designed influences how the children will play. For children living in urban areas, outdoor play is defined as playing with provided equipment or games with sets of rules. Based on the authors' findings in Jakarta, Denpasar, and Yogyakarta, Indonesia, where urban playgrounds are attached to designated green spaces, the characteristics of the playgrounds are mainly as follows:

1. Constructed in a controlled environment to guarantee practicality in maintenance. For example, they have concrete-based flooring and manicured vegetation grown in concrete boxes.
2. Equipped with similar play equipment. Priorities often begin with swings, slides, and see-saws.
3. Designed to ensure clean play (i.e., non-messy).
4. Provides limited opportunity to interact with nature.

Playing in nature benefits children by improving motor skills, developing balance and coordination, enriching creativity, and strengthening the immune system (Fjørtoft, 2001).

However, because of safety and cleanliness concerns (Nusantara et al., 2023), we need a middle ground to promote and reap the benefits of playing in nature. Using upcycled materials addresses some concerns about expanding children's play in nature, including affordability, adaptability to space, and a channel for children's creativity.

By using locally available, locally sourced “unused” materials, we can create affordable, unique play equipment. The custom-built design is adjustable to the available playground space. By offering different play equipment, we pique children's curiosity to stay outdoors and nourish their creativity in play.

With these considerations, our expanded definition of nature play involves playing outdoors using play equipment made from upcycled materials from the surrounding area to maximize interaction with the ever-changing landscapes of both the natural and man-made world.

Based on our experience working with communities in Indonesia, the best approach is to provide samples of the play equipment, along with facilitation for playing together, to expand the nature elements during the play experience. Here are some ideas to jump-start the process (adjusted to Indonesian contexts), drawing inspiration from community-based playground design approaches that emphasize low-cost, locally sourced, and recycled materials (Playground Ideas, n.d.).

1. **Climb the Cliff:** Made from old tires, piled up or tied up together. Tube shape with arms for smaller spaces, cone shape for medium areas, and spider web for larger areas. Children can climb, hang, and hide using the tire structures.
2. **Our World:** Providing and utilizing wooden crates (unused wood or bamboo), stones, and cardboard boxes with decorative art, numbers, colors, and safety measurements as basic structures to build their own world or role-play. These structures can be built around movable vegetation (potted) for children to use as part of creating their world. This idea serves as a temporary pop-up play equipment piece, as some materials are not long-lasting (e.g., cardboard); therefore, the play equipment can change consistently.
3. **Growing You:** Two structures from upcycled steel, 170 cm high, side by side. One can be used for children to climb, with some numbers to measure their height, and the other can be used for a plant to climb as a comparison of how different species grow.

To incorporate safety-first concerns, we recommend using both natural elements and upcycled materials to create landing beds under the play equipment. Ideally, the landing bed should be made of grass or sand. For lower-maintenance options, chopped upcycled tires are another option.

These ideas are deliberately open in design to respond to the shifting availability of upcycled materials for future design augmentation and to accommodate possible suggestions from the community. The children can also serve as designers.

Conclusion & Recommendations

In creating child-friendly cities and communities, nature play is limitedly fostered in Indonesia. Often, nature play occurs in a controlled environment where nature is a mere background for shade and views, without nature elements being part of the play activity.

To address this, we proposed a middle ground that responds to concerns about safety, resources, and cleanliness in nature play by harnessing upcycled materials from the surrounding area to create additional, customizable play equipment and expand the benefits of playing in nature. In addition, upcycled tires are an excellent option for safe landing beds.

The design incorporates natural elements as a bridge to build familiarity with nature. The three proposed basic designs described here serve as a starting point for further development based on material discoveries and suggestions from parents, children, and future designers.

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The Impact of Environmental Changes on Children's Play Experiences

Ridhi Sethi, PhD Human Development, MSc Child Development, MEd

Introduction

Play happens naturally for children and opens their world by stimulating their imagination. Play provides us with a joyful way to connect with, relate to, and interact with the world. A child's healthy development depends on play. It makes learning fun while fostering moral, social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development. Regular playtime helps children grow into competent, self-assured, well-rounded adults. Regular play and exercise are essential for children's development and have many advantages, from better mental and social skills to better physical health (Berk et al., 2006).

Early childhood development is built on play, and having the opportunity to play is a fundamental human need. For children, it is seen as a fundamental right. From a child development perspective, outdoor play is characterized by flexibility, inventiveness, spontaneity, intrinsic drive, and nonliteral or symbolic use of items (Bäckström et al., 2024). Current outdoor trends in early childhood education indicate that these spaces are becoming increasingly bereft of opportunities to experience nature, despite abundant evidence of nature's importance to children's well-being (Dowdell et al., 2011). When used as learning spaces, outdoor spaces can give children the freedom to use their bodies and imaginations to create, invent, and change their surroundings. Additionally, natural materials offer children many opportunities for creative play (Kiewra and Veselack, 2016). They emphasized that young children must experience things firsthand, digest knowledge in ways that suit them, grapple with issues, and develop original, creative solutions to learn (Kiewra and Veselack, 2016).

Today, nearly every child is exposed to at least one of the following climate risks: sand and dust storms, tropical storms, riverine floods, drought, high heat, fire, and heatwaves. At least three overlapping climate threats endanger the health, education, and survival of 1.1 billion children worldwide. Up to six overlapping hazards affect nearly 4 million children worldwide. The paper also examines children's exposure to climate-sensitive risks, including air pollution and vector-borne illnesses such as malaria (UNICEF, 2026).

Problem Statement

Children's outdoor play involves a broad spectrum of activities, skills, and interactions rather than a single characteristic. It encompasses multiple forms of play, including physical, constructive, social, imaginative, and structured games. Consequently, outdoor play environments should be intentionally designed to support a variety of play experiences rather than focusing exclusively on physical activity or one particular type of play. Effective play spaces give children opportunities to climb, jump, run, balance, create, imagine, explore sensory experiences, manipulate objects, and construct with different materials. By offering rich and varied play opportunities, outdoor environments enhance the value of play and better support children's holistic development.

Therefore, the equipment, materials, and features incorporated into outdoor play spaces should be versatile and encourage diverse interactions, enabling children to engage in multiple forms of play that align with their interests and developmental needs. (Ramsden et al., 2025). Environmental changes, including extreme heat, floods, and climate change, have influenced outdoor play. Extreme weather events such as heatwaves, storms, and floods are becoming more frequent and more intense due to climate change, a human-caused global health concern. These events can indirectly affect food security, air and water quality, human and animal security, and health. These affect children's lives the most. According to the Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC, 2023), young children are among the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation, despite contributing the least to greenhouse gas emissions.

Climate change adversely affects all five components of nurturing care—health, nutrition, safety and security, early learning, and responsive caregiving—through increased exposure to air pollution, extreme weather events, food and water insecurity, displacement, and disruptions to education and family wellbeing (ARNEC, 2023). It also affects children's play experiences.

Background

Experts in the field have made several suggestions regarding climate change and play. In a study conducted within the Occupational Therapy Programme at Lund University, Sweden, twenty professionals from Australia, France, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States raised important issues (Bäckström et al., 2024). They discussed how climate change significantly affects children's play options, making outdoor spaces more dangerous, inaccessible, and ill-suited to a variety of play experiences. Rising temperatures, prolonged heatwaves, floods, storms, increased UV radiation, and poor air quality reduce the time children can safely spend outside. Additionally, damage to schoolyards and playgrounds disrupts normal play opportunities. These environmental changes especially threaten unstructured and dangerous play, which is crucial for children's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development.

The study also emphasizes how traditional playgrounds, with their hard surfaces, sparse foliage, and uniform equipment, are particularly susceptible to the effects of climate change and provide less play value. In response, the authors support nature-based play spaces that are climate-resilient and include trees, natural vegetation, permeable surfaces, biodiversity, and loose natural materials. Beyond offering shade, cooling, and protection from severe weather, these settings foster children's creativity, imagination, physical activity, and connection to nature, helping preserve play opportunities in a changing climate. The authors also concluded that without meaningful climate adaptation, meaningful outdoor play becomes increasingly limited, and children risk greater occupational deprivation and inequality (Bäckström et al., 2024). The climate crisis is not a single event. It triggers a cascading impact on healthcare, education, WASH, nutrition, and child protection and social protection services (Ahuja, 2026).

Appropriate Approaches

Play is linked to environmental impacts in two main ways: how nature and outdoor spaces affect play, and how play activities affect the planet. Natural play areas improve health and climate resilience, whereas heavy production of sports and toys can

harm ecosystems (Schmidt, 2006). Ambient environmental conditions affect many aspects of daily life, including active and recreational activities, and both influence and contribute to climate change (Lee et al., 2025). Nanda (2024) reports that rising temperatures, prolonged heatwaves, and increasingly unsafe outdoor conditions are limiting children's opportunities for outdoor play in several countries, including India, with potential consequences for their physical health, social development, and overall well-being.

Summer vacations used to be spent playing outside from dawn until dusk, riding bikes, racing, playing games like hide-and-seek and tag under the fading orange sky, taking walks in the cool morning breeze, climbing trees in the afternoon, and playing matches on roads and backyards. The children would come home for a few snacks, lots of tales about their adventures in the neighbourhood, and new discoveries. During summer vacation, people learned life skills and developed well-rounded personalities while spending time outside.

Children's daily routines have changed significantly over the past 20 years; many now spend much more time indoors engaged in screen-based activities, including watching television, using smartphones, playing video games, and interacting with digital devices. This is a significant shift from earlier generations, when kids spent more of their free time playing outside and engaging in physical activities. Fewer opportunities for regular physical activity and active play stem from increasingly sedentary lifestyles driven by greater dependence on screens.

Reduced outdoor play and exercise significantly affect children's physical health. The increasing incidence of childhood obesity and overweight, which is strongly linked to inadequate physical activity, is one of the most alarming results. Additionally, chronic health issues like cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, poor musculoskeletal development, and decreased physical fitness are all made more likely by sedentary behaviour. Excessive screen time has been associated with negative impacts on children's mental health, sleep quality, social relationships, and general well-being in addition to physical health.

These patterns emphasize the importance of providing children with opportunities and nurturing environments that support regular outdoor play and physical activity for healthy development.

Concern over the rising incidence of lifestyles that lead to the development of non-communicable diseases is growing on a global scale. Physical inactivity and childhood obesity have become significant public health issues, underscoring the need for interventions that take a life-course approach and encourage healthy behaviours from a young age. Globally, childhood obesity rates have risen to previously unheard-of heights, and more kids are falling short of the required levels of physical activity. This trend is especially troubling because sedentary behaviour and physical activity habits formed in infancy often carry over into adulthood, affecting long-term health. Dwindling opportunities for active outdoor play and a diminished emphasis on healthy, active living during childhood have also raised concerns about children's right to play, health, and holistic development (Tremblay et al., 2015).

Conclusion

Children are especially vulnerable to climate change. Schools frequently close and playgrounds vanish during floods. When youngsters should be studying and playing with friends, they spend weeks indoors, miss school, and lose their routine. Climate change is also affecting their sense of security and childhood, as well as their immediate surroundings. To protect children from the effects of climate change and air pollution, we must prioritise their environmental health. UNICEF cautions that we are already witnessing changes in children's health and communities in a climate-changed world.

The desirability and viability of outdoor learning are influenced by various contexts and conditions worldwide. Numerous contextual elements, such as weather, culture, safety, and the availability of nearby outdoor spaces, shape its practice (Kiviranta et al., 2024).

In the era of climate change, supporting children's play requires balancing environmental protection with its positive developmental benefits. Educators, families, legislators, and communities should implement measures to foster safer, more resilient, and more adaptive play environments rather than limiting outdoor play (UNICEF,

2026). Governments must introduce a wide range of measures to ensure the fulfillment of all Article 31 rights, and to ensure that children's experience of place informs decision-making. Children need to be at the heart of the global response.

Play areas that are climate-resilient should be accessible, safe, and entertaining even amid shifting weather. Incorporating natural shade through trees and vegetation, offering covered outdoor areas and shelters, and utilizing a variety of natural elements like gardens, logs, rocks, and loose parts that promote different types of play and improve kids' interaction with nature are all ways to accomplish this (Kiviranta et al., 2024; Ramsden et al., 2025). To reduce the effects of heat stress and flooding while allowing kids to play outside safely, outdoor environments in areas with rising temperatures and extreme weather events should also incorporate climate-adaptive design elements like heat-reducing surfaces, permeable materials, and enhanced drainage systems (Lee et al., 2025; UNICEF, 2026).

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The Taiwan Children's Play Declaration and Protocol for Replication

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Introduction

Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states that "children have the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts" (UNCRC, 1989).

Because of their age, children are still trying to understand the world and explore themselves. No one must overlook their inherent rights. Children's right to rest and play should be equally prioritized. Outside school and home hours, children should be allowed to engage in physical activity and play that suit their interests and allow them to socialize with their peers.

The fourth edition of the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework: Domain and Process is an official document of the American Occupational Therapy Association. (Occupations are the activities people engage in every day to give their lives meaning and purpose. Occupations can be done alone or with family members and friends; occupations can be done at home, at work or school, and in the community.

Every individual should participate in purposeful, meaningful activities that promote physical and mental health and overall quality of life. These activities should be emphasized across nine key occupations that evolve with age: activities of daily living, play, social participation, rest and sleep, work, education, health management, and others. Among these, the Play & Leisure domain is especially critical for children and adolescents. Play is an essential part of children's lives, serving as the most natural means of communication, self-discovery, emotional expression, and exploration of the world.

Play Taiwan was officially registered as a non-profit organization in 2017. A group of parents concerned about children's play spontaneously initiated a revolution across Taiwan, advocating for the most fun activities and playground changes. Through

their actions, they aim to amplify children's voices and ensure more people hear them. We prioritize policies and legislation for children's play and safeguard children's right to play, supporting a childhood filled with unrestricted play.

To ensure children's right to play and the time they need to play, we must understand their needs and listen to their voices. This aligns with Article 12-1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which asserts that "the child who is capable of forming his or her own views has the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child" (UNCRC, 1989). In recent years, playground and park design, urban planning, and policy in many countries have begun to prioritize children's participation by actively listening to their needs and opinions.

Problem Statement

According to statistics from the Ministry of Health and Welfare (Taiwan, 2023), the number of children with developmental delays receiving early intervention increased from 26,392 in 2021 to 34,781 in 2023. A report from the Hsin-Yi Foundation (2022) indicates that after COVID-19, the overall motor skills of children aged 2 to 6 have declined. This is particularly evident in mobility skills (such as walking, running, jumping, hopping on one foot, climbing, etc.) and stability skills (such as balancing, rotating, stretching, swinging, etc.), which are worse than pre-COVID levels.

Although playgrounds have become more playful and diverse, with nearly 500 playgrounds renovated and more than 20 child play rights advocacy campaigns carried out, the COVID-19 pandemic temporarily closed many playgrounds and outdoor spaces. Because of the pandemic's severity and school closures, children spent more time at home, reducing outdoor playtime and physical activity. Consequently, children's physical fitness and development have deteriorated.

Based on Play Taiwan's 2022 survey of 2467 questionnaires, we found that children's playtime was insufficient: preschool children went to outdoor playgrounds 1–2 times per week, whereas school-age children did so only 1–2 times per month. This suggests that school-age children's weekly playtime may be less than 25% of preschool children's. Compared to the minimum weekly play/physical activity time recommended

by WHO (2020) and UNICEF (2019), the duration observed in this study is substantially less.

Background

Various factors influence this discrepancy in playtime. For example, these include academic pressures, parental safety concerns, and limited accessible play spaces. Additionally, past research shows that reducing playtime negatively affects children's development. In the United States, recent evidence indicates that state recess requirements can support the provision of daily recess: a 2025 cross-sectional study of Arkansas elementary schools found that 85.5% of schools met the state's 40-minute daily recess requirement, although implementation gaps persisted across school contexts (Howie et al., 2025).

Graham et al. (2022) emphasize that adequate physical activity is essential for school-aged children and contributes to cardiovascular and metabolic health, musculoskeletal development, and psychological well-being. A complex interplay of biological, psychological, sociocultural, and environmental factors shapes physical activity behaviors.

Strategies

What are the reasons behind the lack of playtime for children at school and at home? What do children have to say about their rights and needs regarding play? Through a research approach centered on child participation, we aimed to develop a systematic methodology for converting child input into actionable policy documents. This framework aims to restore children's fundamental right to express their needs for play, ensure their direct participation, and culminate in a formal declaration.

Lundy's (2007) Model of Participation operationalizes the four key elements of UNCRC Article 12 (1989): *Space* (opportunity to express views), *Voice* (facilitation of expression), *Audience* (listening to views), and *Influence* (acting upon views). This model addresses common limitations in child participation research by ensuring authentic rather than tokenistic involvement (Lundy, 2007). The social-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) provided additional theoretical grounding, recognizing that

children's play experiences are influenced by multiple interconnected systems, ranging from individual factors to policy environments (Sallis et al., 2008).

Based on these models, our preliminary study used focus group interviews and supportive tools (Figure 1) with 22 children aged 6 to 12 to explore outdoor play experiences and the "barriers" school-aged children face (Figure 2). The interview results revealed the status of their visits to outdoor playgrounds, including duration and travel distance—as well as the factors that hinder access. Common barriers identified include insufficient time, excessive distance, and unengaging playground facilities. These findings enabled the development of evidence-based policy recommendations.

Figure 1. Five supportive tools to help children express themselves



Figure 2. Children actively participating in focus group discussions, using drawings and verbal expressions to articulate their play experiences and barriers.



Barrier Category	Specific Issues	Children's Voices
School Constraints	- Limited recess time - Multiple competing activities - Classroom duties - Homework requirements	"Teachers make us stay inside for discipline" "We have to clean classrooms during break" "Too much homework on weekends"
Adult Restrictions	- Conservative safety attitudes - Age-based limitations - Supervision requirements	"Adults think climbing is too dangerous" "Older kids cannot use playground equipment" "Need parents to go to parks"
Environmental Factors	- Weather constraints - Poor playground design - Overcrowding - Transportation barriers	"Too hot and get sunburned" "Playgrounds are boring and repetitive" "Too many people make it dangerous"
Policy/Structural	- Inadequate space allocation - Safety regulations - Scheduling conflicts	"Not enough space to run on campus" "Many fun activities are 'forbidden'" "After-school tutoring takes play time"

Drawing on the "Play Pyramid" (Gill, 2021) concept from Tim Gill's Urban Playground, we identify time, space, other children, and adult attitudes as the four critical factors influencing the realization of children's right to play. Furthermore, a comparative analysis of research from Taiwan and the UK reveals that the primary divergence between the two nations lies in the degree of "adult intervention" (Graham et al., 2022).

Our findings align closely with international research examining playground barriers. We compare results with Graham et al.'s (2022) UK study of 65 primary school children.

Study	Location	Sample (N)	Method	Key Barriers Identified
Graham et al. (2022)	United Kingdom	65 children (9-11 years)	Focus groups	• Wet weather • Safety concerns • Playground hierarchy • Poor space design • Overcrowding • Staff supervision • Resource limitations • Need for quiet areas
Current Study	Taiwan	22 children (6-12 years)	Focus groups + tools	• Rain/weather • Activities deemed dangerous • Age restrictions • Poor design (boring/repetitive) • Overcrowding safety concerns • Teacher/adult limitations • Homework requirements • Disciplinary restrictions

The remarkable similarity across cultural contexts suggests universal challenges in children's play experiences and supports the need for systematic policy intervention.

Drawing on the perspectives of 22 children, we developed a child-voiced declaration (Figure 3) that focuses on children's own experiences and priorities. This declaration aims to prompt responsive action from caregivers, practitioners, and policymakers, enabling them to address and improve the structural and policy-related barriers that currently constrain children's opportunities for play.

No.	Original Version (Mandarin)	Translated English Version
1	我知道學習很重要，請大人相信遊戲對我也一樣重要。	I know learning is important—please trust that play is just as important for me.
2	我們有我們的創意，我們有我們想玩的方式，但是我們需要快樂遊戲，但是我們也會注意安全，請大人們不要限制我們。	We have our own creativity and our own ways of playing. We want joyful, happy play, and we will stay safe—please do not limit us unnecessarily.
3	我需要準時下課，我需要玩，需要自己決定要做甚麼的時間，請大家把時間還給我們。	I need to finish class on time. I need time to play and choose what I want to do. Please give our play time back.

No.	Original Version (Mandarin)	Translated English Version
4	請大人保證我們能擁有足夠奔跑遊戲的校園空間。	Please make sure we have enough space on campus to run and play freely.
5	我想有伴一起玩，增添遊戲樂趣。	I want to play with friends—it makes play more fun.
6	給我我想玩且涼快的公園！請大人為我們玩的地方想辦法。	Give me a nice, shady park that's cool to play in—not too hot! Please help find us great places to play.
7	我會在有點刺激的遊戲中成長，請不要剝奪我長大的力量。	I grow strong through exciting, challenging play—please do not take away my chance to grow.

Figure 3. Taiwan Children's Play Declaration (Mandarin version)

The declaration was developed through an intensive, multi-stage process, including child-participatory workshops, critical play dialogues, and expert consultation sessions. Through these platforms, children actively identified the systemic issues impacting their daily play lives—ranging from severely limited access to safe, natural play spaces to the problem of academic over-scheduling.

Following the release of the Taiwan Children's Play Declaration, a legislator proposed a motion in the Legislative Yuan (the Parliament). Both the Minister of Education and the Premier (Head of the Executive Yuan) agreed to deliberate on a national policy on children's play and cross-ministerial cooperation (United Daily News, 2024).

Recommendations

From Research to Policy: Expert Policy Translation.

We consulted five experts from landscape design, an environmental NGO, a pediatrician, and human rights organizations who provided technical expertise to translate children's voices into feasible policy recommendations.

1. Promoting Unstructured Play

The intensity of advocacy targeting parents regarding the significance and benefits of unstructured play should be reinforced, comparable to the promotional efforts of public health campaigns (e.g., "5 A Day "). Furthermore, the core benefit of play, articulated as

"Potential Development Originates in Play," should be officially integrated into a Parenting and Children's Health Handbook (or equivalent governmental guidance documents).

2. Enhancing Play Time and Framework

The guarantee of playtime and activities must be increased to ensure that after-school programs allocate sufficient time for activities, exercise, and free play. In parallel with the "After-School Sports Programs" model, "After-School Play Programs" should be established.

3. Safeguarding Recess Time

It is essential to guarantee that children are afforded a full and uninterrupted recess time following every instructional session.

4. Modifying Physical Activity Curricula

Revise existing school physical activity initiatives (e.g., the Sport & Health 150 Policy in Taiwan) to explicitly include diverse play activities as a key component, rather than focusing exclusively on structured exercises such as running and jump rope.

5. Mandating and Auditing School Playground Provision

Establishing two distinct playgrounds in Primary and Secondary Schools—one for upper/middle grades and one for lower grades, designed to accommodate children's developmental needs and promote age-appropriate segregation —requires a rigorous audit of implementation status. This is crucial to ensure children have access to adequate and appropriate recreational space.

6. Assessing and Optimizing On-Campus Play Accessibility

Conduct a comprehensive inventory of on-campus play. Strategies such as converting underutilized classrooms into multi-functional play spaces should be pursued to expand opportunities for children, particularly those housed on upper floors, to engage in physical activity outside the classroom.

7. Inventorying Temporary Play Streets in School Zones

Pilot an assessment of the feasibility of temporarily converting the operational hours of School Access Routes across various municipalities into play streets. This initiative aims to increase access to play spaces and playmates, drawing on the "Streets for Kids" program developed by the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) in America.

8. Addressing Climate Change Impacts on Play

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment No. 26, issued on August 22, 2023, asserts that climate and environmental degradation compromise children's rights to engage in outdoor activities and interact with the natural environment. The government must adopt proactive measures, including installing cooling infrastructure, such as shading and water play facilities, to safeguard children's rights to health and play.

9. Institutionalizing Child and Youth Participation in Play Design

To align with the general principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child—specifically the "Best Interests of the Child" and the Right to Express Views—it is imperative to develop "Child and Youth Participation Design Guidelines" and accompanying training programs. The objective is to institutionalize child participation in the creation of play spaces that are optimally suited to children's physical and mental developmental needs.

The Taiwan Children's Play Declaration is a landmark, child-led advocacy initiative fundamentally championing the right to play as an essential human right for every child. Co-created by children and the dedicated organization Taiwan Parks and Playgrounds for Children by Children, the Declaration is a powerful instrument that reflects children's genuine voices, distinct needs, and lived perspectives across the nation.

Their collective ideas were meticulously shaped into a Declaration that not only issues a firm demand for action but also inspires a necessary paradigm shift toward a more inclusive, child-centered approach in urban planning, education, and policymaking.

REPLICATION PROTOCOL — SUMMARY

The Children's Play Declaration

A Short-Form Guide to the Focus Group Method and Expression Tools

Developed by Play Taiwan · Prepared for the International Play Association (IPA)USA,
2026

This is a condensed excerpt of Play Taiwan's full replication protocol, focused on the focus-group method and expression tools. A complete version — including the full timeline, team roles, expert consultation process, and appendices — is available on request.

About This Protocol

This protocol documents how Play Taiwan ran a national, child-led research project that produced the Taiwan Children's Play Declaration, written in children's own words. The Declaration prompted a motion in Taiwan's Legislative Yuan and public commitments from the Minister of Education and the Premier. It is written so that another country, city, or organization can run the same process and produce its own Declaration, adapting age range, group size, and number of sites to local context.

The process rests on Lundy's Model of Participation (2007) — children must be given Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence, all four — supported by Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological model (barriers exist at every level, from the child to policy) and Gill's Play Pyramid (2021): time, space, playmates, and adult attitudes.

Recruiting Child Participants

1. Age: primary/elementary children, ages 6–12 (grades 1–6), split into a lower-grade band (1–3) and upper-grade band (4–6), interviewed separately.
2. Outdoor play experience: screen for moderate, recent playground use — not children from families who already visit constantly, nor children with almost no outdoor play.

3. Group size: 6–8 children per group (per grade band), including in the pilot test.
Run in more than one city if resources allow, to check whether findings are local or general.

The Five Expression Tools

Children this age cannot express complex needs the way adults do in an interview. Taiwan's focus groups used five concrete, hands-on tools so children could think, remember, and speak in ways that suited them. Localize each tool (place names, local reasons children can't play outside) rather than inventing new ones, to keep results comparable across countries.

Tool 1 — My Play Diary

Each child logs 7 days of play: how long it lasted and whether it happened at a playground. Only time the child chose for themselves counts as "play" — adult-scheduled activities (sports class, tutoring, chores) are excluded.

Tool 2 — My Playground Map

Children list up to 9 parks/playgrounds they like, based on past experience and distance from home — surfacing which places they actually know, value, and can reach.

Tool 3 — Play Barrier Cards

A set of simple cards (six colors, plus blanks) covering where children play at school and after school, and the reasons they can't go outside. Children sort or point to cards — a low-pressure, non-verbal way in for shy or younger children.

Tool 4 — Opinion Hand-Cards

Each child holds a two-sided hand-card — thumbs-up on one side (agree), a question mark on the other (I see it differently) — so even quiet children can register a view in real time.

Tool 5 – International Playground Case Sharing

Near the end of the session, the facilitator shows photos of distinctive playgrounds from other countries; children react, compare, and vote for favorites — surfacing desires ("I didn't know a playground could be that tall") children wouldn't otherwise think to name.

Running the Focus Group Session (90~120 minutes)

Time	Segment	Purpose & activity
10 min	Icebreaker	A short game (e.g. charades) to ease nervousness before serious discussion.
5 min	Anchoring	Confirm today's topic and how "outdoor play" is being defined.
15 min ×3	Divergence — school / after-school / weekend	Using Tools 1 & 4: for each time window, discuss where play happens, with whom, and what they play.
20 min	Divergence — play barriers	Using Tools 3 & 4: children choose or write reasons they can't go outside to play, and share why.
20 min	My playground sharing	Using Tool 2: children introduce their playground map and say why they like these places.
15 min	International case sharing	Using Tool 5: facilitator shows international cases; children vote their top 3, sparking discussion.
5 min	Break / close	Rest, thank participants, collect materials.

Facilitation tips from Taiwan's sessions:

1. Let children point to a card or poster before asking them to explain in words — this reliably draws out quieter children.
2. Ask about all three time windows (school / after-school / weekend) even if children volunteer information early — barriers differ sharply between them.
3. When a child mentions an adult rule ("we can't hang upside down on the bar"), ask what happened right before the rule was made — this surfaces the safety narrative behind restrictions, which experts can later respond to directly.

Beyond the Session: From Data to Policy Change

Code the Data

Group everything children said into a small set of barrier themes (e.g. school constraints, adult restrictions, environmental factors, policy/structural). Then draft

Declaration articles in children's own first-person words — each one traceable to something a specific child actually said, not an adult's summary of what they "probably meant."

Validate the Declaration With Children

This step is easy to skip, but it is where the Declaration's legitimacy actually comes from. Invite all participating children — in person and online — to a joint validation session, and go through the draft article by article. Ask the children directly whether the tone, word choice, and sentences match what they meant. Revise or remove any article that doesn't pass this check with the children on the spot, before it goes to the expert panel.

Consult the Expert Panel

Consult a multi-disciplinary panel twice — once on the child-validated draft, once on final policy recommendations — spanning health, design, education, environment, rights/policy, and inclusion. The panel's job is to translate what children said into technically and politically feasible action, without overruling or softening it.

Release & Advocate

Release the Declaration at a public forum with participating children and media, alongside a short visual version and a full white paper for policymakers. Approach legislators directly — even without new legislation, a motion or committee question can compel a government re

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