

Indiana Jones Themed Playground

Play is a universal activity that we see in both in the human and animal kingdom. Schechner describes as “[...]genetically based lifelong activity [...] consisting of play acts[...]”. We used it to evolve the entirety of our life time, to learn, to enjoy yourself and to test each other. But it is often among our age peers, and seen through the evolutionary approach(suggested by Schechner) there are difference between child play and adult play. While adults play with their children and smaller siblings to a certain degree, society teaches us to stop playing when we grow up. As a result, many adults fantasies are constrained, which can lead to barrier for play between children and adults, even their parents. The barrier can be torn down and a playground is a good context in which to do so.

Playgrounds are often visited by children accompanied by their parents, and they are designed for room for both. They are one of the few public places that strongly affords playful activity, and for the parents interacting with the children during these activities. However, even in playgrounds, this interaction declines as the children gets older and are able to handle themselves. The majority of parents ends up sitting on a bench waiting for their children to finish. But what if we could provide a context that could engagement both self sufficient children and their parents in a mutual playful activity? With this question in mind, the idea for a playground started.

We designed an Indiana Jones Themed Playground. The context of the playground is an adventure for both children and their parents inspired from the classic adventure movie. The target group for the playground is children from approximately 5-11 and parents with a smartPhone. The playground is divided into four ‘chapters’ - ‘The Desert’, ‘The Mineshaft’, ‘The German Castle’, and ‘The Trophy Hunt’, each with an unique story that can be found at the storyboard, which is placed at the beginning of each activity. Each story leads onto the next activity, thereby driving the pace forward. An overview of the playground can be seen on figure 1.

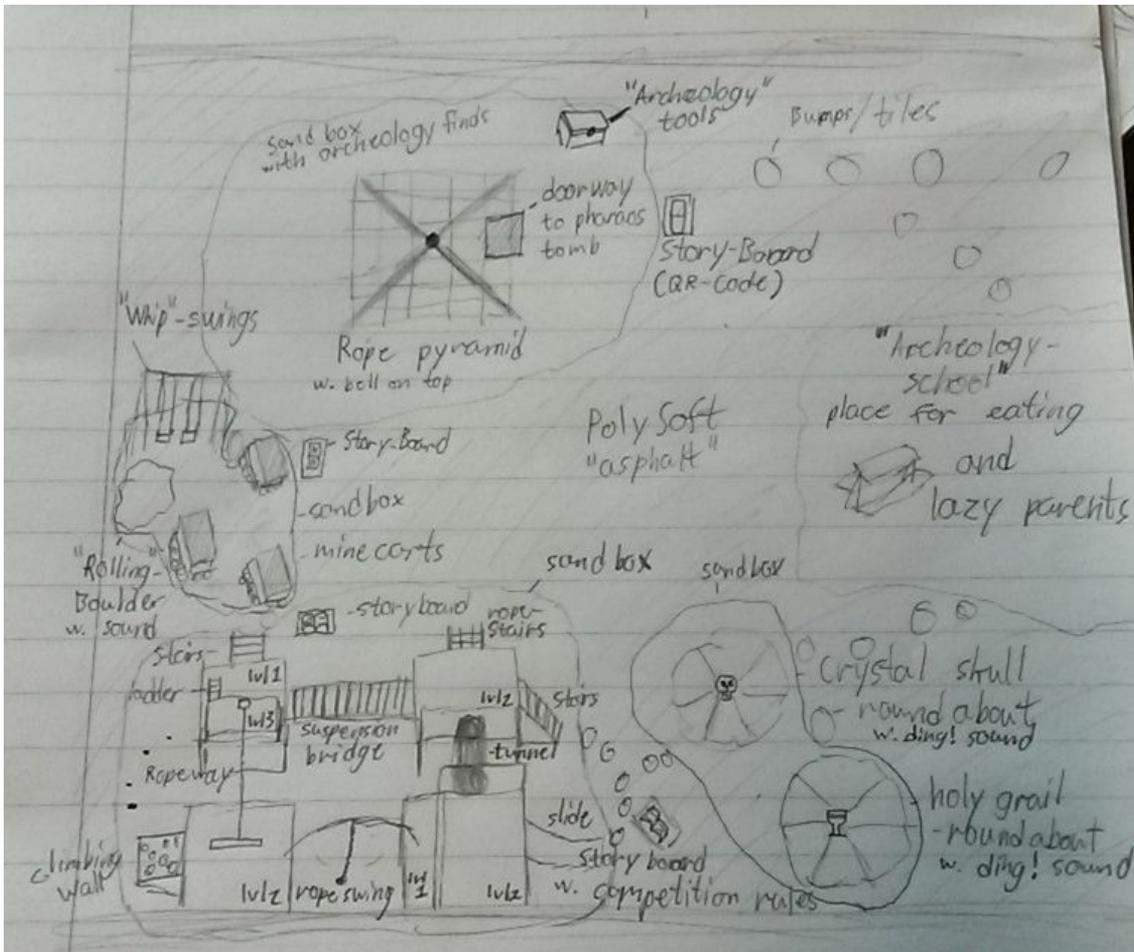


Figure 1: Overview of playground

Each chapter has certain designed activities. The activities are described as following

- In 'The Desert' you can:
 - climb to the top of the rope pyramid and ring the bell.
 - explore the pharaoh's tomb below the pyramid
 - dig for artefacts in the sand(chained to the bottom) with shovels provided
- In 'The Mineshaft' you can:
 - swing on the whip-swings
 - rock on the minecarts to "escape" the boulder
- In 'The German Castle' you can:
 - Use different transportations to transit through the castle(ropeway, rope swing, suspension bridge and tunnel)
 - Climb to different levels. The different high are in order to differentiate between the older of the target group(old enough to climb to the top themselves) and the youngest of the target group (staying low with parent)
 - Slide down the slide
- In 'The Trophy Hunt' you can:
 - Spin the merry-go-around, and thereby lift the treasure until there is a 'BING'-sound indicating that the treasure is yours
 - Compete with other who gets to the treasure first.

Finally there is an 'Archeology school' where there is benches and room for lunch and lazy parents.

Each chapter ground is covered by sand and the 'Archeology school' is covered by grass, while the rest of the playground is covered by PolySoft(rubber asphalt). Transition between the different chapters are guided by small bumps in the PolySoft, which signifies the direction of the story. The choice of ground material is to signify what actions could be done, e.g. jumping and digging in sand and easier running on the PolySoft, while preventing injuries from fall accidents. Reducing the chances of injuries will increase the engagement as we assume pain can break engagement and therefore break off the play experience, before it was intended.

At its core, the play experience of this playgrounds is going on an adventure with your closest. It is based around mimicry for the children, where parents acts as the storytellers of the play act. By giving the parents a more relevant role than simple caretaker of the child, the barrier between the play of the child and the adult is broken down. Through the usage of smartphone, it also becomes more socially acceptable for an adult to join in as storyteller, as the majority of the target group are not able to handle a smartphone by themselves. While the main concept of the playground is to provide rules and structure of the play activity through the storyteller, we realised that it would be harmful for the creativity and get in the way of engagement into the activity. Therefore the design had to support more free play and afford more than the actions signified by the structure and rules provided from the storytelling. To do this, we focused on making sure that the children were able to leave the facilities at any point. Through this, the entire playground would afford free play, and allowing the participants to follow their own pace and flow and decide when the play experience stops, while it still would be possible to access a suggested pace through the storytelling app. In addition we found it important to make the activity path was nonlinear. Whatever 'chapter' the users of the playground would want to play with should be as easily accessible as all the others. The reasoning behind this was to further promote free play and construction of the participants own rules and structures for their play act.

A final important part of designing a playground to discussion, is the visibility throughout the playground. In the situation that the children's on structure and rules takes over and pushes the parent aside, it is important that the parents can keep watch over the children, simply due to security. This already fairly supported through the nonlinear play activity design, and by adding vantage points(e.g. the boulder or smaller hills of PolySoft) further increased the possible overview. It was due to the requirement of security that the pyramid was designed to be entirely of rope, so there is transparency throughout the entire playground.

The connection between children and adults are drive closer through play due to the societal tendency toward adults playing. By applying the adults role through a more socially acceptable toy (the mobile phone), I think that the adulting playing along will appear more natural. Throughout the process, the importance of making play free and based on the player's own rules became clear. You can design a perfect story, but the participant often know what they enjoy. Especially children.