

on the first page of the typescript, which reads "Play in Hospitals—1984 (?)" Texts of Cornelia Hahn Oberlander for various lectures, 1984. AP075.S3.SS1.019, Cornelia Hahn Oberlander Fonds, CCA. Gift of Cornelia Hahn Oberlander © CCA.

Spaces for Creative Play in Our Cities

The capacity to use leisure rightly is
the basis of a man's whole life.
— Aristotle, *Ethics*

Space is at a premium in our urban areas and time has come for a full assessment of the use of open spaces. One of the most urgent questions is, How can we provide in our cities adequate play spaces for our growing population? Most cities are overcrowded and man has hardly place to sit, to walk, to play, or to contemplate at leisure. "Our cities of tomorrow will have to place man's needs—air, light, and space ahead of those of the machine, including the automobile."¹

We must therefore make our public servants, our parks boards' members, and our town planning commissioners aware that their recreation areas must reflect the needs of our times. Learning to play cannot be taught in the home only. It is essential that competent leaders are available so that children of each neighbourhood learn to use the resources fully that their city provides. All over the world today of parks talk about the necessity of learning to play at an early age.

Playgrounds must therefore encourage absorption in activity and unselfconscious

concentration. They ought to provide seclusion from disturbing or diverting influences, afford an exit from the everyday pressures, and give to the child at play the possibility of a make-believe world.

Professor Brightbill at a recent Vancouver seminar suggested that leisure time ought to be time for self-fulfillment and not time of just being amused or entertained by gadgets. We must therefore instill in the very young interests and skills to prepare them for the new opportunities for leisure. According to Professor Brightbill, we ought to encourage skills that:

- 1 help give us a stronger spiritual base
- 2 sharpen our abilities to communicate effectively and reflect the social graces
- 3 aid body development, movement, and motor co-ordination
- 4 contribute to safety and survival (e.g. swimming and diving)
- 5 make use of the creative hands as in the graphic and plastic arts
- 6 take us deep into literature
- 7 bring us close to nature, and especially outdoor living
- 8 create music, or at least make it possible for us to enjoy it

- 9 provide the opportunity to express ourselves through drama in a variety of forms
- 10 open the door of the scientific world and
- 11 those that encourage us to be of service to others.

Into this setting then the Children's Creative Centre, a part of the Canadian Federal Pavilion at Expo '67 in Montreal, has been conceived. The Centre consists of four classrooms where the best methods in music, art, drama, and nursery education will be taught. The project director is the well-known educator, Mrs. H.P. Hill of Ottawa.² The Centre will draw its children from the families visiting the Canadian Pavilion. It is estimated that about 75,000 youngsters will pass through the Centre during the six months of the World's Fair. This area will not only serve children, but also leaders in the field of education and recreation who will be able to observe through a one-way screen all activities. Instruction will be provided by professionally trained specialists. The children will have a stimulating experience combined with fun and will be exposed to new ideas which may spark an interest in their future.

The Playground is the outdoor waiting room for the Children's Creative Centre. In size it can be compared to a city "vest-pocket

park"—60' × 120' in the open area and 60' × 40' in the covered area.

Upon being invited to design this area, I asked myself, What is it that children really like to do? They like to run, they like to climb, to crawl, to build, to feel contrasting textures and see colours. In creating this playground it was the designer's task to interpret the ideas of an educator and to relate those to design principles in order to achieve a total environment of "education for creativity," as Mrs. Hill calls it.³

The restful garden—like [the] atmosphere of gentle mounds, pine trees, and hedges—is purposefully created to contrast with the concrete and asphalt jungle effect of the world of the city child.

There are three parts:

- | | | |
|-----|--------------|-------------------|
| I | Covered area | 6- to 11- |
| II | Open area | year olds |
| III | Nursery area | 3- to 5-year-olds |

Covered Area

This is designed for quiet play and contains:

- 1 Manipulative Wall. This is a colourful section of the bridge abutment with a series of Op-Art puzzles which the child can arrange in infinite ways.
- 2 Musical Screens. These are four free-standing screens composed of different music instruments, strings, bells, drums, and xylophone. The child can make his own sounds with

little wooden felt-covered hammers. The manipulative wall and musical screens are being designed by one of Canada's leading artists, Gordon Smith,⁴ of Vancouver.

- 3 Story-telling area with movable bookshelf.
- 4 Playtables.
- 5 For those children who like to exercise their muscles on rainy days, a *Commando Net*.

Open Area

- 1 Viewing Platforms or docks. The Docks extend over the present waterway. This area is meant for children to relax and quietly watch boats pass by.
- 2 Sand and Canal Area. To reach the sand area, one can balance on logs or cross tiny, arched bridges or just leap. A 16" wide, 4" deep canal winds around the sand areas, with flowing water. Boats can be assembled and floated, or children can actually pan for "gold" as the top layer of the canal bed is to have polished agate and fool's gold. There is an old "Dory" from Nova Scotia which rocks to the motion of the children's imaginary storms—or lulling calm.

- 3 Well scaled sand toys are available for digging.
- 4 The upper sand area contains a large barkless tree lying on its side for climbing and on the lower area is a hollow stave pipe with peep holes, to crawl through.
- 5 A planting area near the fence of bullrushes relieves the monotony of the fence.
- 6 Moving to the bottom of the plan, a blackboard on the wall for drawing or school play is installed. The other nooks have store and house play areas and in one of them are actual "Pan Abode" logs with specially loose-fitting joints for easy construction of play houses.
- 7 The circle in front of the store play nook is a "Wobble-Walk," 10' in diameter; children will try to get across it and sink and tumble, like walking on an immense feather bed.
- 8 Tree-House Area. In order to give some undulation to the ground, three small hillocks with pine trees are placed in the position shown on the plan. These are to provide a natural feeling to the area and also act as a visual and noise barrier for the children in the classroom. The highest

- mound is 8' high and has a steep wooden chute from the top. It can be reached by cedar steps. The trees in the mound area are large white pines. The mounds will be sodded with a grass selected for intensive use.
- 9 The main mound has a secret tunnel built into it through which children can crawl.

Nursery Area is separated by a 4' high cedar hedge. It contains:

- 1 Sand box
- 2 Water-play area
- 3 Rabbit cages
- 4 Rocking boat
- 5 Hollow blocks
- 6 Play house
- 7 Climbing tepee
- 8 Flower pots with a great variety of plants are placed on the periphery to be watered and studied by the children.
- 9 Step-seating arrangement has been made for mothers to sit with shy youngsters and help them overcome any fear of strangeness.

This playground, though specially designed for Expo '67, ought to provide some new ideas for our crowded urban communities. Everywhere there are areas that could be made into vest-pocket parks with mounds, ravines, tree houses, streams for wading, and places for building. After all, the "Adventure Playgrounds" of Great Britain and Denmark stimulate most the child's imagination.

Whatever we do, let us build playgrounds that will help the young to develop a feeling of self-fulfillment in the "Age of Leisure" and make recreation a creative experience.

Notes

- 1 Professor Charles K. Brightbill, Professor and Head of Department of Recreation and Municipal Park Administration, University of Illinois, during the Parks and Leisure Seminar, February 26 to 27, 1965, University of British Columbia.
- 2 Editor's note: Polly Hill (1917-2015), early childhood development educator, author, film maker, and community organizer.
- 3 Editor's note: see Polly Hill, "Children's Creative Centre at Canada's Expo '67," *Young Children* 22, no. 5 (May 1967): 258.
- 4 Editor's note: Gordon A. Smith (1919-2020), British-born, Vancouver-based modernist painter.