

Review

Why Can't My Child Play Too? Current Challenges of Public Playgrounds for Children with Disabilities.

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Abstract: Current Australian legislation promotes playground inclusion for all children, and playgrounds serve as local, safe, and vital spaces for children of all ages to play. The World Health Organisation International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, Children and Youth Version states that play is a key activity to engage children with disability in various areas of their lives, and there is no doubt that playgrounds can promote community and social engagement for all children. Consequently, accessible playgrounds are important because they can offer motor, psychological, and social skill development in a fun-filled environment. Nonetheless, some children encounter challenges in playground settings. Surprisingly, very little research has been conducted in Australia on the experiences of children with disabilities in public playgrounds. According to the National Autism Strategy announced by the Australian Government in 2022, there is a growing number of Australians on the autism spectrum. For many individuals with an autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), life outcomes in education, health, and family functioning are worse than they should be. Consequently, while this paper addresses a general perspective of inclusive playground experience for children with disabilities, there is also a focus on the experiences of children with ASD in playgrounds. As a result, this literature review begins with an introduction to the prevalence of autistic spectrum disorder and its associated characteristics. It presents existing research on play, examining various playground factors that impact the experiences of children with disabilities, including ASD. In addition, the role of parents/carers in influencing the outdoor experiences of children with disability is also explored. In conclusion, this paper summarises key findings and proposes relevant research questions to address these gaps.

Keywords: playgrounds; playground equipment; parent perspectives; children with disabilities



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1. Introduction

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a perplexing conundrum of lifelong developmental disability [1], alongside a variety of personal strengths such as a sharp focus, deep interest, honesty, loyalty, kindness, persistence, fairness, and kindness [2]. People with ASD contribute positively to society [3] and should be afforded access to all aspects of the human experience to lead a happy and fulfilling life. For children with ASD, this means enjoying a childhood that values play and provides access to environments designed to facilitate play, such as playgrounds. However, certain barriers exist that pose challenges to such access and inclusion. In general, it is known that people with disabilities have less engagement in outdoor activities than desired due to difficulties in accessing community facilities and experiencing discrimination in various life settings [4]. Sadly, these experiences also extend to people with ASD.

To begin to understand the population of children with ASD, it is vital to be aware of contemporary prevalence rates. ASD prevalence has recently been reported to be on the rise. Maenner et al. [5] noted that the prevalence of ASD among 8-year-old children

in the United States had increased significantly from 1 in 68 in 2010 to 1 in 36 in 2020. Similarly, the Australian Bureau of Statistics [6] reported a 25.1% increase in Australians diagnosed with ASD from 2015 to 2018, with the highest prevalence among children aged 5 to 14. These increasing diagnostic rates are attributed to the broadening of the diagnostic criteria for ASD to include less severe behaviours, resulting in increased diagnostic rates over time [7].

Playgrounds are busy and exciting outdoor play spaces that should be inviting for all children, including children with ASD. Playgrounds should encourage movement, exploration and socialisation, all critical elements in a child's development [8]. However, for children with ASD, the features of playgrounds are somewhat at odds with their individual characteristics. Playground participation has been found to be hindered by the sensorimotor impairments displayed by children with ASD [9]. Askari et al. [10] noted that children with ASD engaged in fewer recreational activities, particularly those activities conducted outdoors, compared to their neurotypical peers. Further, Must et al. [11] reported behavioural problems and difficulties with motor skills and social communication among children with ASD during play activities.

Play has been described as the principal occupation of childhood [8] and as the primary medium for childhood social communication [12]. Given the importance of play as a human right for all children [13], the unique playground experience of children with ASD needs to be understood. This paper begins with a brief overview of relevant theoretical conceptions of play. This will then be followed by a commentary on the current literature that explores the importance of play and inclusion of all children, what is known about the playground experience for children with disability, including ASD, and factors that influence the playground experience for children with a disability, such as playground access and equipment, parents, carers and legislation.

2. Theoretical Conceptions of Play

Children's play is important and yet, play spaces can look different in different contexts. There are school playgrounds, preschool playgrounds, public playgrounds, backyards, family restaurant playgrounds (e.g., McDonald's indoor or outdoor play places) and in some cases, play spaces can be found in local shopping centres. Everyone in the community has the potential to benefit cognitively from play. When children play, they develop important developmental skills like language, problem-solving, social skills and strategic planning. Playground-based learning has been identified by some theorists as a Community of Practice [14]. The concept of Situated Learning was first proposed by cognitive anthropologist Jean Lave and educational theorist Etienne Wenger in 1991 [15]. In 2010, Wenger further emphasised that novices begin learning by observing members of the community and then, they slowly move from the periphery of the community to become fully participating members. The purpose of conceptualising a public playground as a Community of Practice is to understand what play and play-based learning are, and the importance of play for children.

However, according to Lynch et al. [16], the success of a child's play experience when they have a disability depends on many more factors than just observing others at play. Other important factors include adapted equipment that meets their specific needs, alongside certain playground environmental aspects such as the materials that equipment is made of [17]. In 1977, psychologist James Gibson coined the term "affordance" [18]. Here Gibson was referring to all action possibilities with an object based on a user's physical capabilities—for example, a chair affords sitting on, or standing on, or throwing. However, in a study by Stanton-Chapman and Schmidt [19], caregivers noted that children with disabilities could not fully participate in recreational activities when they visited local parks and playgrounds. The main reason was that the play equipment had not been adapted to their children's special needs.

Long [20] has also suggested that play culture and attitudes of tolerance within communities significantly influence children's opportunities to play. In addition, Childs

and Scanlon [21] noted that collaborations between community microsystems can have a greater effect on addressing a child's issues than the sum of their individual contributions. As a result, ecological system theories have been highlighted in existing research as useful frameworks for organising and understanding the contextual factors affecting individuals with disability [22,23]. Bronfenbrenner's 1974 ecological systems theory is a useful theory to examine the factors that may influence the playground experiences of children with disability [24]. These factors encompass the individual characteristics associated with having a disability and the Community of Practice. Specifically, microsystem elements focus on the parents/carers and the playground environment; the mesosystem involves interactions between different microsystems; and the exosystem may include playground and urban designers as well as local council and government authorities. Finally, there are various ideological models to consider in the macrosystem. The macrosystem delves into the impact of ideological elements on children's development. Within this context, three different ideological approaches to disabilities emerged: the medical model of disability [25], the social model of disability [26,27], and the biopsychosocial model of disability [28].

The traditional medical model attributed the difficulties faced by individuals with disabilities to their impairments. In contrast to the medical model, the social model, established in the 1970s, viewed disability as a form of social oppression and exclusion [26]. The social model suggested that society was responsible for an individual's inability to engage in life settings and advocated for the removal of barriers that impede individuals with disabilities. The medical and social models focused on impairment and society, respectively, and reflected opposing perspectives [29]. For example, Prellwitz and Skär [30] reported that parents expressed different views on the problem of accessibility in playgrounds. Some parents attributed the accessibility problem to their children's disability and expressed their acceptance of the difficulty, while others regarded the problem as deficits in the playground environment and expressed anger towards schools and communities [30]. These two views represent the shortcomings of both the medical model and the social model of disability.

Fortunately, the biopsychosocial model of disability can offer a solution by applying a broader, integrative approach to disability that examines biological, psychological, social, and environmental factors [29,31]. For instance, Therrien et al. [32] noted that the biopsychosocial model of disability could help explain how physical barriers in playgrounds have contributed to social challenges for children with limited speech. The World Health Organization [33] International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health has been described as the most relevant biopsychosocial model of disability [33]. Through employing the biopsychosocial model researchers may examine the biological and the physical aspects of disabilities, the psychological factors, including social and communication skills, and the social and environmental factors, such as the physical features and the atmosphere of the playground. The biopsychosocial approach is recommended by Tait and Silveira [29], the authors, as offering the most holistic understanding of the playground experiences of children with disability.

3. The Importance of Play for All Children

Given the increasing awareness of ASD, society should be compelled to ensure that the needs of people with ASD, including their need for meaningful play in inclusive environments are met. However, limited research has been conducted into inclusive playground design for children with ASD. The notion and importance of play for all will now be explored, along with what is known about the playground experience for children with ASD.

Play is an essential part of childhood. It is regarded as a fundamental human right for all children, regardless of their abilities [34]. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [35] emphasised the importance of equal access to play for children with disabilities. Additionally, the World Health Organisation [36] published the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, Children and Youth Version, which stated that play is a key activity to engage children with disabilities in

various areas of their lives, recognising playgrounds as settings that promote community and social engagement for all children.

Play is essential for childhood development, contributing to the growth of cognitive, physical, and social skills while fostering emotional connections between parents and children [37]. Coelho et al. [38] found that positive play behaviours fostered social acceptance, peer relationships and friendships. Qu et al. [39] noted that imaginative play promoted child development in the theory of mind and in language. Rowe et al. [40] reported that pretend play contributed to creativity and social skills development in early childhood. Despite their characteristic deficits in communication and restricted, repetitive behaviours and interests, O’Keeffe and McNally [41] reported that play-based interventions supported social communication skills in children with ASD. Collectively, these authors reinforce the importance of play for children with ASD.

4. Playgrounds Should Include All Children

Playgrounds serve as spaces for physical activities as well as convenient places to foster social interactions within communities [42]. Children and parents alike highly value the social function of playgrounds [43]. Jeanes and Magee [44] reported that playgrounds that were free of discrimination and offered a sense of belonging contributed to the confidence and social participation of children with disabilities.

Social networks are key factors that impact children’s experiences in playgrounds. Stanton-Chapman and Schmidt [45] found that peer familiarity in school playgrounds contributed to children’s high-quality play, including associative and cooperative play. In contrast, in public playgrounds, children tended to engage in solitary and parallel play due to discomfort with playing with unfamiliar peers [45]. Playgrounds serve as common and vital spaces for all children to engage in play and contribute to children’s overall development [43]. However, when playgrounds don’t meet broad human needs, they fail people, including people with disabilities and their families.

Accessible playgrounds and inclusive playgrounds are two terms that are commonly used in the literature discussing playground experiences for children with disabilities. According to Harris et al. [46], the concept of accessible playgrounds focuses on addressing physical barriers in playgrounds to ensure the environment is usable for people with physical disabilities. Importantly, the concept of inclusive playgrounds goes beyond physical accessibility to promote the social inclusion of people with varying abilities [46]. Fernelius and Christensen [17] defined inclusive playgrounds as those designed to accommodate people of all ages and abilities, promoting their equal access to play as well as social opportunities. However, Prellwitz and Skär [30] sadly reported that children with disabilities had restricted access to playgrounds. Despite the synthesis of evidence-based recommendations for designing playgrounds to enable participation for children with disabilities by Brown et al. [47], van Engelen et al. [48] found that children with disabilities continued to encounter social exclusion in playgrounds. Further, Kianfar and Brischetto [49] reported that playground design tended to neglect the needs of children with ASD.

Playgrounds typically involve outdoor play, which is known to be an important aspect of play for all children, and those children surrounded by a social network are more likely to engage in outdoor play [50]. Tremblay et al. [51] found that outdoor play meant children were more active, which contributed to improved health and development. Kemple et al. [52] noted that outdoor play in natural environments offered various sensory stimuli for children, facilitating cognitive development and creativity. Bento and Dias [53] reported that when compared to indoor activities, outdoor play provided more opportunities for children to have contact with the natural elements, learn from potential risks, and interact and cooperate with peers.

Unfortunately, the contemporary literature points to a decline in childhood outdoor play as children spend more time participating in indoor activities, engaging with electronic entertainment and computer usage [51]. Bassett et al. [54] noted that this decline in outdoor play has contributed to the rise in childhood obesity and sedentary behaviours. This has

become significant for children with ASD who already face physical and social barriers to outdoor play [8]. Society is now tasked with raising awareness about the benefits of outdoor play and encouraging participation in outdoor play activities by all children.

Playgrounds are common spaces and important sites that engage children in outdoor play. According to Stanton-Chapman and Schmidt [19], playgrounds were the most frequently visited recreational facility by children with disabilities in the United States. Gil-Madrona et al. [43] reported that playgrounds contributed to children's motor skills, psychological development, and social skills. Similarly, Lynch et al. [16] noted that playgrounds were valued spaces in communities for socialising, enhancing a sense of belonging and promoting social inclusion. However, the literature indicates that children with disabilities have challenging experiences in playgrounds [55,56]. Many of these challenges relate to inaccessible and unsuitable play equipment and inadequate playground design.

5. The Playground Experience for Child with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Despite the importance of play for all children, the playground experience of children with ASD remains somewhat under researched. In work by Conn [57] who studied play through the autobiographies of adults with ASD, diverse sensory play was identified and highly favoured as part of their childhood memories. Work by Fahy et al. [58] studied six children with ASD, finding a spectrum of engagement with play including a willingness for outdoor play and imaginary play; a dislike of messy play (for example playing with mud); and a mixed response to risky play, with some children seeking challenges and increased sensory input. These authors also reported a reluctance to play when the number of children using the playground increased. In this situation, the children with ASD preferred time away from the large group while maintaining the capacity to continue observing other children [58]. In a study of seven preschoolers with ASD, Coughlan and Lynch [8] described the emerging interest in "autistic play culture" (p. 2). Their work focussed on the nature of outdoor play and how participation in play could be enabled. Coughlan and Lynch [8] coined "autistic socialising" (p. 9), where children showed onlooker participation rather than engagement while in a playground setting, similar to behaviours reported by Fahy et al. [58]. They concluded that children with ASD showed distinctive play styles and preferences, and without doubt, these children embraced the opportunity to play.

Social communication challenges experienced by children with ASD can see them on the periphery of social networks and can impact their playground experience. Social communication is defined as a set of skills that include social interaction or "...a reciprocal exchange of information" [41] (p. 51), and communication or "...an interactive process in which information is exchanged between partners through multiple means such as body language, speech, facial expressions and gestures" [41] (p. 51). Such social communication involves reciprocity between parties; however, the characteristics of ASD can challenge such social exchanges.

During social communication, a child with ASD may display characteristic ASD behaviours that are not considered neurotypical and result in stigma and exclusion [59]. Paterson et al. [60] noted that children with ASD tended to struggle with controlling their behaviours and emotions and displayed negative emotions from infancy, with limited interest in approaching new people and things. Similarly, Reyes et al. [61] reported that children with ASD experienced temperamental difficulties, such as increased withdrawal, heightened negative emotions, with low adaptability compared to their neurotypical peers. Such difficulties impact the child's social communication and interests [62].

Children with ASD often grapple with social communication difficulties and can encounter social challenges in playgrounds. Locke et al. [63] reported that children with ASD were more likely to spend recess playing alone or unengaged when compared to their neurotypical peers. Similarly, Fahy et al. [58] observed that children with ASD sought quiet areas within the play space, away from large groups. These behaviours may indicate that the studied children with ASD felt overwhelmed by noise or crowds and experienced difficulties fitting into the play culture of their peers [58]. Bento and Dias [53]

reported listening difficulties experienced by individuals with ASD in environments with background noise, which hindered their social interactions. Jachyra et al. [64] found that children with ASD, particularly older children, experienced exclusion and bullying during physical activities, which negatively impacted their enjoyment and experiences in such activities.

One common social environment that should facilitate social communication is school, an environment where play occurs and is valued. O’Keeffe and McNally [41] listed educational contexts as key locations for social communication interventions, being situations where authentic interactions between children in everyday environments can occur. However, Tsamitrou and Plumet [65] found that difficulties in social interactions and cognitive abilities impacted the school performance of children with ASD. Cunningham [66] noted that children with ASD were often misunderstood by teachers and experienced anxiety related to social and environmental aspects of school. Additionally, Smith et al. [67] reported that parents of children with ASD face challenges in interacting with teachers and experience stigma within school settings.

There have been efforts made to explore solutions to promote the social inclusion of children of all abilities in playgrounds. For example, in a case study examining an inclusive playground in the United Kingdom, Jeanes and Magee [44] highlighted the positive impact of fully integrated accessible equipment as it improved socialisation, increased confidence, and reduced social isolation among children with disabilities and their families. Additionally, Stanton-Chapman and Schmidt [19] identified four key aspects in their US-based study on caregivers’ insights for supporting social participation in playgrounds for children with various disabilities and their families. These insights included catering to the needs of all family members, peer support for caregivers, promoting the development of friendships between children with disabilities and their peers, and addressing parents’ fears of their children experiencing bullying and teasing [19]. There is work to be conducted to focus these insights to accommodate children with ASD and their families.

6. Playground Environments and Inclusion

The success of a child’s play experience depends on many factors including equipment that meets specific needs, alongside certain playground environments. Play equipment constitutes a fundamental physical element of a playground. As children are more likely to prefer playgrounds with an assortment of play equipment [42,68], playgrounds should provide a variety of play opportunities, both in terms of choice and challenge. In fact, Broekhuizen et al. [69] reported a positive relationship between the diversity of play equipment in school playgrounds and children’s physical activity levels, with a variety of equipment resulting in higher rates of movement. Fahy et al. [58] found that children with ASD showed more engagement in play activities when more play equipment was provided in playgrounds.

Careful and considered selection of play equipment is critical. Play equipment that has varying difficulty levels presents children with positive challenges that contribute to childhood motor development and self-confidence [53,70]. Brussoni et al. [71] noted that it was essential for playgrounds to include challenging elements, offering opportunities for children to promote risk management competence and expand their abilities in height, balance and speed. Bourke and Sargisson [72] reported that children favoured play items that provided risk-taking experiences with height or speed, such as roundabouts, large-basket swings and climbing nests.

Despite the importance of play equipment being diverse with variations in the levels of challenge, certain features are often inadequate and even lacking in playgrounds. Black and Ollerton [73] noted that playground users expected more play equipment to cater for children of different ages and abilities. Veitch et al. [50] reported parental concern about the lack of diversity of playground equipment, which was more suited for preschool children and lacked appeal for older children. Similarly, Lynch et al. [16] reported that playground

equipment lacked diversity and varying challenging levels to cater for the interests of people of different ages and abilities.

Children with disabilities often have distinct needs or preferences when it comes to play equipment. Caregivers noted children with disabilities could not fully participate in recreational activities with inappropriate play equipment, with non-adapted equipment being the main reason [19]. Similarly, a survey among special education professionals indicated that children with disabilities had limited access to and interest in play equipment in schools and community playgrounds [74]. Moreover, Fahy et al. [58] noted that children with ASD preferred play activities offering strong sensory stimuli or repetitive movements. The inclusion of sensory equipment in playgrounds, such as play panels with varying textures for tactile needs, and musical equipment, to cater for children with sensorimotor concerns such as children with ASD was also recommended [74].

Natural elements are increasingly being incorporated into playgrounds as popular features. Dymont and O'Connell [75] observed that natural area spaces in playgrounds were the most popular spaces among preschool children. Herrington and Brussoni [76] found that natural elements in play spaces fostered diverse forms of play and promoted playground engagement for children of different ages and abilities. Fahy et al. [58] reported that children with ASD favoured natural components in public playgrounds and observed that these components facilitated the child with ASD's engagement in imaginative play.

Sargisson and McLean [77] found that children spend more time interacting with natural elements in playgrounds that offer a greater variety of natural features. Certain natural elements like grass, shrubs, and trees, which undergo seasonal changes, offer a variety of play opportunities in the playgrounds over time [77]. Moreover, parents indicated that playgrounds with natural elements provided the chance for their families to connect with nature, enjoy fresh air, play with natural materials, and enhance overall enjoyment [16].

In striving for playgrounds that meet the needs of all children, including those with ASD, the adoption of a universal design (UD) approach is recommended [78,79]. The concept of UD was initially employed in architecture and environmental design to ensure an environment free of barriers for all [80]. In the General Comment No.17 on play and leisure, the United Nations identified UD as a guideline for planning and developing playgrounds to ensure the right to play for children with disabilities [13].

A commonly cited explanation of the concept of UD is the seven principles established by the Centre for Universal Design in 1977: equitable use, flexibility in use, simple and intuitive use, perceptible information, tolerance for error, low physical effort, and size and space for approach and use [81]. These goals focus on the outcomes of UD and promoting inclusion and social participation for people of all abilities. However, Moore et al. [82] found little consensus regarding the interpretation of the UD concept when applied to playground design. Some researchers used it synonymously with accessibility, while others believed it extends beyond accessibility [82]. Lynch et al. [78] reviewed policies and guidelines for inclusive play and connected UD with play value principles, proposing UD as a way to enhance playground design. There is merit in this approach, especially to support the playground participation of children with ASD.

7. Parents, Carers and Playground Legislation

Parents and carers play a significant role in their children's outdoor play experiences, and parents generally acknowledge the role of outdoor play in their children's health and development [83,84]. Lee et al. [85] found that children's outdoor play and time positively correlated with parental attitude and support. Through attentive and responsive supervision of outdoor play, parents are known to contribute to children's learning and development [53]. Importantly, Jachyra et al. [64] found that a family's active engagement in physical activities improved the social status and sense of self among their child with ASD.

However, the tension between parental positive attitudes towards outdoor play and their concern about their children's competence and safety must be considered. For example,

Little [84] reported that parental fear of potential risks led to over-protective parenting practices that impeded their children's outdoor play. Similarly, Jidovtseff et al. [86] found that parents permitted their child's outdoor play in situations where they perceived their child to be competent, however, they restricted the activities where they doubted their child's ability. In the case of children with ASD, such restriction has been found to reduce the child's mastery [58].

Children generally visit playgrounds under parent and carer supervision, and they are dependent on parents' and carers' preferences when selecting which playground to visit. Lynch et al. [16] found that parents and carers preferred playgrounds closer to their homes where their children had greater opportunities to interact with familiar peers, increasing the likelihood of social play. Parents with more than one child tended to prefer playgrounds with a variety of play equipment that appealed to children of different ages [50]. In contrast, parents of children with ASD preferred smaller and quieter playgrounds close to home rather than large playgrounds with a diverse range of play equipment [87]. Furthermore, these parents tended to schedule their visits to playgrounds around quiet times when social rules and disability stigma were less of a concern [87]. Similarly, Davy et al. [88] reported that parents of children with ASD often chose to visit public areas at quiet times to accommodate their child's sensory needs.

Children with ASD can require higher levels of parental supervision in comparison to their neurotypical peers during leisure activities [11]. They can face challenges following the social rules in playgrounds such as turn-taking and sharing [87]. Stanton-Chapman and Schmidt [19] reported that parents/carers of children with ASD were less likely to bring their families to recreational facilities, such as playgrounds, and more inclined to keep their children at home when compared to parents of children with other disabilities.

There is no doubting the influence that parents and carers can have on the childhood experience of playgrounds, as the decision makers and enablers. Alongside parents and carers, legislation also exists to facilitate inclusion and safety. The CRPD and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) are crucial human rights legislation that compel governments worldwide to develop laws and policies to protect the rights of people with disabilities, including children [34,35]. The CRPD has been widely accepted and ratified by over 180 countries since being implemented in 2008, with the aim to ensure equal enjoyment of human rights by all individuals with disabilities and to promote inclusive policies and practices [35]. Similarly, the UNCRC focuses on children's rights to life, education, healthcare and a safe environment [34]. Article 31 of CRPD specifically acknowledges children's rights to engage in play and leisure activities that are suitable for their age, and to have equitable and adequate opportunities for such activities [34].

Australia is committed to promoting and protecting the rights of children and persons with disabilities, having signed the UNCRC in 1991 and ratified the CRPD in 2008. The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA), aligns with CRPD and UNCRC and prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities and their families in various areas such as education, employment, and access to premises, services and accommodation [89]. As specified by the DDA, individuals with disabilities should not face unjustifiable hardship in accessing public places, such as community playgrounds, on the same basis as those without disabilities [90]. The DDA, along with Australia's Disability Strategy 2021 to 2031 [91] and state legislation, reflects the dedication of the Australian government to promote equality and inclusion for people with disabilities.

In addition to the overarching legislation frameworks, CRPD, UNCRC and DDA, there are specific policies and guidelines that provide tools for designing, evaluating, and managing playgrounds. Standards Australia is the leading organisation in Australia for developing standards, such as AS 4685 and AS 4422, for playground design, manufacture, installation, and maintenance. Although these standards are not specified in legislation, they are widely adopted by local councils and government authorities in Australia to ensure the safety and quality of public playgrounds. The standards serve as the minimum requirements to mitigate the risk of injury to users. Moore et al. [92] noted that playground

design should exceed the minimum accessibility requirements to enrich the user experience. Factors such as inclusivity and play value should be considered when developing playgrounds to ensure they are safe and enjoyable for all users [17,78].

The Everyone Can Play Guidelines, developed by New South Wales Government go beyond accessibility to promote consideration of the various ways to create inclusive play spaces for the entire community [93]. Through consultation with associations and individuals representing children with disabilities, the Victorian government issued The Good Play Space Guide in early 2007 [94]. This guide includes a dedicated section on design ideas to cater for common impairment types that can impact access to play spaces, such as vision, hearing, touch, intellectual and cognitive impairments, and physical disability. Additionally, the guide emphasises the importance of including parents and carers in play spaces and provides recommendations for neighbourhood paths, public transport, parking, and amenities to facilitate visiting play spaces [94].

In Australia, legislation and policies have been established to promote the rights of children with disabilities in accessing and participating in playgrounds. Nonetheless, it is imperative to consistently apply these guidelines to guarantee that all playgrounds offer safe and enjoyable experiences for all children.

8. Conclusions

The concept of playground play is to give children opportunities to expand their imagination, self-awareness, risk perception and identity, as well as their social and motor skills [95]. The diverse play opportunities that can emerge within playgrounds make these spaces a unique setting where children of all abilities can choose when, where and how they can connect with the world around them. Playgrounds are important to children with disabilities, but their access to play possibilities is sometimes restricted by the designs of the playgrounds. For children in general, and children with disabilities in particular, the playground environment should be designed in a way that accommodates specific needs [96]. This is vitally important because, as reported by Prellwitz and Skär [97], “. . . the design of inclusive playground environments to meet the unique needs of children with disabilities often determines their success” (p. 148). Understanding and addressing their specific challenges is crucial for creating a supportive and inclusive playground environment for children with disabilities [98]. Consequently, it is likely that adults will learn more about play activities in childhood by examining the children’s perspectives on play and its significance to them.

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