

# Breastfeeding Cafe

Connect, facilitate, nurture and empower

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(Newsletter Vol 7, June 2017)

Hello,

Hope everybody is enjoying their summer in the valley. Summer vacation is about to start in schools and we are planning to enjoy three months of uninterrupted play. Summer often means many visits to the beach, camping, and playing for all of us. This brings me to the word 'play' – whose importance in childhood I would like to emphasize again, given that it is vacation time.

When I talk about play, I am referring to uninterrupted playing where 3 to 4 year-olds play



without any guidance from their elders, but in a safe place and under watchful eyes of parents or caretakers. Many of the parents to whom I have spoken agree with me in feeling that there is an absence of such a safe space – a place where they can see their child play, uninterrupted by anybody. As we keep researching more articles, we get to know that providing open-ended play materials allow children the opportunity to be designs, ideas, and curious, creative, and direct their own play. There are no rules or expectations for how a play item must be used – no specific steps to follow, no right or wrong way, and no ultimate goal to reach or achieve.

Although we have talked about the importance of open-ended play in our earlier newsletters, we would love to mention a few points in this newsletter too. Breastfeeding Cafe would be an identity in itself because of its open-ended play space both indoors and outdoors, apart from being the parents' go-to place. We would love to make the parents comfortable and happy with our play space while they are busy chatting, having meetings, or working. Through an elaborate research, (over the past 7-8 months through surveys and discussion groups) we conclude that many parents miss a place where they can find some time to devote to themselves while also being able to know that their child is flourishing out in the play space, enjoying all those age-appropriate imaginative game without any guidance – but under the watchful eyes of caretakers, who happen to be parents too. Research shows that good play spaces avoid segregating children based on age or ability, and are laid out so that equipment and features are used by a wide range of children – even allowing different patterns of usage throughout the day or week<sup>1</sup>.

We strongly believe that play areas should be designed and conceived carefully – and this needs the help of the entire community to carefully draft a play space plan that is beneficial for

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.playengland.org.uk/media/70684/design-for-play.pdf>

the entire community. We would love to hear from our readers about their designs, ideas and plans for an ideal play space in Breastfeeding Cafe. Do write to us at [tanaya@breastfeeding.cafe](mailto:tanaya@breastfeeding.cafe).

We also believe that building such a space is tough in the age of ubiquitous software solutions: many problems are addressed primarily through technology, but we really need to add a human touch to complete the solution. From this issue of the newsletter, we are starting a new thread, “Sampark” (a Hindi word, meaning “relationship”/“contact”), to discuss a few fields where we would love to have some human interaction in spite of the availability of machines and software. We do believe that a software solution or an AI machine can make the process smooth, but without human interaction, we are on the verge of a breakdown as a society. Thus, today’s topic is about PLAY.



Emotions play a critical role in human society. Evolutionary psychiatrist Randolph Nesse<sup>2</sup>, of the University of Michigan, thinks that individual emotions are actually adaptations selected by evolution to help us cope with specific situations. Nesse calls emotions “the mind’s software”. When faced with a sad situation, the mind brings up the sadness program to cope with it, and when the situation brightens, the mind gets into the happiness loop.

The bottom line is that – over evolutionary time – those emotions that have been useful in keeping people alive have also compelled them to mate and bring up offspring, and so they have been hammered into our brains, even if we don’t like them.

Since humans are fundamentally social animals, Nesse also points out that we have specific social emotions that are also deeply embedded in human nature.

“We are animals that, in the deepest sense, rely on others for survival. And so, we don’t just have personal emotions: we have ones that ensnare us with the actions and emotions of others<sup>3</sup>.”

Keeping the above lines in mind, let’s discuss the word “Play”.

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Randolph\\_M.\\_Nesse](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Randolph_M._Nesse)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.livescience.com/2431-humans-bother-emotions.html>

When we search Google for this word, this is a definition that shows up: “engage in activity for enjoyment and recreation rather than a serious or practical purpose”. As we have discussed in our earlier newsletters too, ‘play’ is an important part of childhood. It is through ‘play’ that children understand each other and make sense of the world. In other words, play is the work for children.

So how important here is the role of technology?

Research says that technology cannot take the role of a playmate or real play for a child who is under 12 years of age. Children learn through play at this age. There are various types of play through which they try to discover the world at their own pace: social play, constructive play, imaginative play, and so on<sup>4</sup>. To build them into a healthy and balanced human being, it is very necessary to give importance to the role of play in a child’s life. A child playing alone with a smart device is functioning almost entirely in a virtual world, with limited real social interaction. Social interaction with peers is an important skill to be developed in childhood. Similarly, there are other examples where ‘playing’ enables us for those later stages in life. Let’s end this with a quote from Sir Ken Robinson:

“To be creative you have to do something. Creativity is very practical. I think of it as applied imagination, putting your imagination to work.<sup>5</sup>”

Playing is creativity; playing is work; playing is imagination. It is like building something that might be useful for that child in the later stages of life. Technology cannot help them develop these skills. Let us allow the child to be creative, to work on their skills without interrupting them much. They need to nurture their imagination to solve those complex problems that humanity faces today. They will be able to use technology in the best possible way, then, to solve critical problems that the world is grappling with today. We have something great to share with you all too, we have connected with Playground Ideas for all those Play needs in our breastfeeding cafe. We love what they are doing and would love ourself to be involved with them once the physical space is in place.

Joanna from Playground Ideas has shared the story of Marcus Veerman<sup>6</sup>, the founder of Playground ideas, and how Playground ideas came into existence. We are thankful to playground ideas for supporting us in our project from the very beginning and having faith in us.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://childdevelopmentinfo.com/child-development/play-work-of-children/pl1/#.WS5CCNlrLIU>

<sup>5</sup>

<https://medium.com/@playgroundideas/sir-ken-robinson-says-imagination-is-what-makes-us-human-20f0f9b1ae40>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GEBzO77EAac>

## Spotlight

“Playground Ideas was born by sheer accident. When my wife Willow agreed to marry me in 2006, it was on the condition that we would spend a portion of our lives together in some far flung region of the world doing something for the common good. That day arrived sooner than I thought and the following year the two of us stepped onto a plane bound for Mae Sot, Thailand with a single backpack each. Willow had been offered a job working with refugees along the Thai-Burma border. I left a great position in Melbourne, Australia, and arrived in Thailand with absolutely no idea what I was going to do for the next 2 years. For the first time in my adult life, I was free to do whatever I wanted.

As I had nothing better to do, I said yes to basically anything asked of me. I built a geodesic dome sauna and taught photography to children. I dabbled in making motorbike trailers, bamboo and linoleum kayaks, solar ovens and hot water services from local materials. Then a local organization asked if I would help build them a playground, and I said, “why not?” With a background in alternative education, a toolkit of basic building skills, and a generally inquisitive mind, I threw together a simple design. It was comprised of 2 see-saws made from used motorbike bearings and tree trunks, 2 rope and wood swings, a slide and a two-story icosahedron cubby house with a leaf-thatched roof. I recruited a crew of volunteers and builders and we set to work. Little did I know this humble little playground would thrust me onto a path of 8 crazy years of playground building and the birth of an open-source movement which has helped to change the lives of over 350,000 children.

Those years of playground building were a time of constant learning through iteration in fast-forward, with every new builder, teacher, and group of kids adding their insights and advising us on what worked best. Each new play space became more stimulating, stronger, and safer than the last. And news began to spread. I started posting photos of our work on the internet and soon requests for playground building assistance were coming from other parts of Thailand and then from around the world. But by the end of those 2 years and 40 playgrounds, we were exhausted.

Beyond exhausted. In my last year in Thailand I became so burnt out that I contracted dengue fever, influenza type b, and had my appendix out. I couldn't keep going like this, and neither could we as an organization. We couldn't afford to fly across the world and help every community as the balance of funds that would actually hit the ground would be unethical. A better, more cost effective plan was necessary if we were going to meet the need that we were facing. It was only when I took a step back and looked over those 2 years that I began to notice something incredible. Of all the playground materials and labor, 70% was locally donated or self-funded by the schools and organizations themselves. Unlike many NGO's that see a need and try to fix it, we had been given the opportunity to follow the communities' lead and simply create the tools to make their ideas happen. This realization planted the seed for what Playground Ideas would become.

It was the enthusiasm of the headmasters, teachers, parents, and caretakers to take a stand for their children that inspired and drove us. They knew that 6-hours of rote learning in

packed classrooms was not the answer to holistic education and they knew their children deserved better. They believed safe spaces for children to play were a priority for their community. They taught us about the importance of play for their children's development and about the dire lack of safe play spaces in their communities.

(They knew that 6 hours of rote learning wasn't the answer to holistic education and they knew their children deserved better.)

The cognitive benefits of play are something I only understand now. Through my work, I've had the opportunity to learn from play experts in the fields of economics, psychology, child development, education, and neuroscience, whose work has illustrated the fact that play is the most powerful tool we can give children. It is as important to a child's brain development as food and sleep. Multiple long term studies have found early play interventions to increase IQ scores, psychosocial skills, schooling attainment, economic earnings, and lower rates of imprisonment. The community leaders I worked with hadn't read this research. But they had seen the lack of play in their schools and communities and they knew first-hand that it needed to change.

People around the globe are identifying the issue that time and space for play is crucial to a child's healthy development and they are looking for people who can help them in their cause. We are honored to work with those inspiring teachers, community members, parents, and builders — wherever they are — to create stimulating spaces that can help to transform the education and wellbeing of their children. We're standing alongside as they build futures where their children will thrive, not merely survive<sup>7</sup>.”

We would love to know your story too. If you feel moved to share with this community, Please drop us an email at [tanaya@breastfeeding.cafe](mailto:tanaya@breastfeeding.cafe). We can't wait to hear your challenges, ideas, wishes and successes.

Warm Regards,  
Tanaya  
Breastfeeding Cafe.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://medium.com/synapse/the-cubby-house-where-it-all-began-92d77aa29748>