



# **Reimagining Kitchener Parks Playful Approaches to Language Development**

Emily Dirks, Katherine Guo, Lauren Stockholm & Tiana Krsmanovic

Virtual presentation to City of Kitchener Parks Staff, Kitchener ON.

April 12, 2022.

Term project in partial fulfillment of requirements for Course PSY453W

Language Development and Social Inequity.

Instructor: Dr. Daniela O'Neill. Dept. of Psychology, University of

Waterloo, ON [doneill@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:doneill@uwaterloo.ca)

Hi! We're Emily, Katherine, Lauren and Tiana and we're excited to present to you our ideas to embellish our local parks. We have spent the past semester researching developmental psychology and impressive parks to help inform our design decisions. We hope you enjoy our presentation!

# Agenda

1

## Oaten Park

### A Classic Park

Well-loved structures that back language development.

2

## Kinzie Park

### Celestial Wonders

A space-themed park introducing children to STEM-related topics.

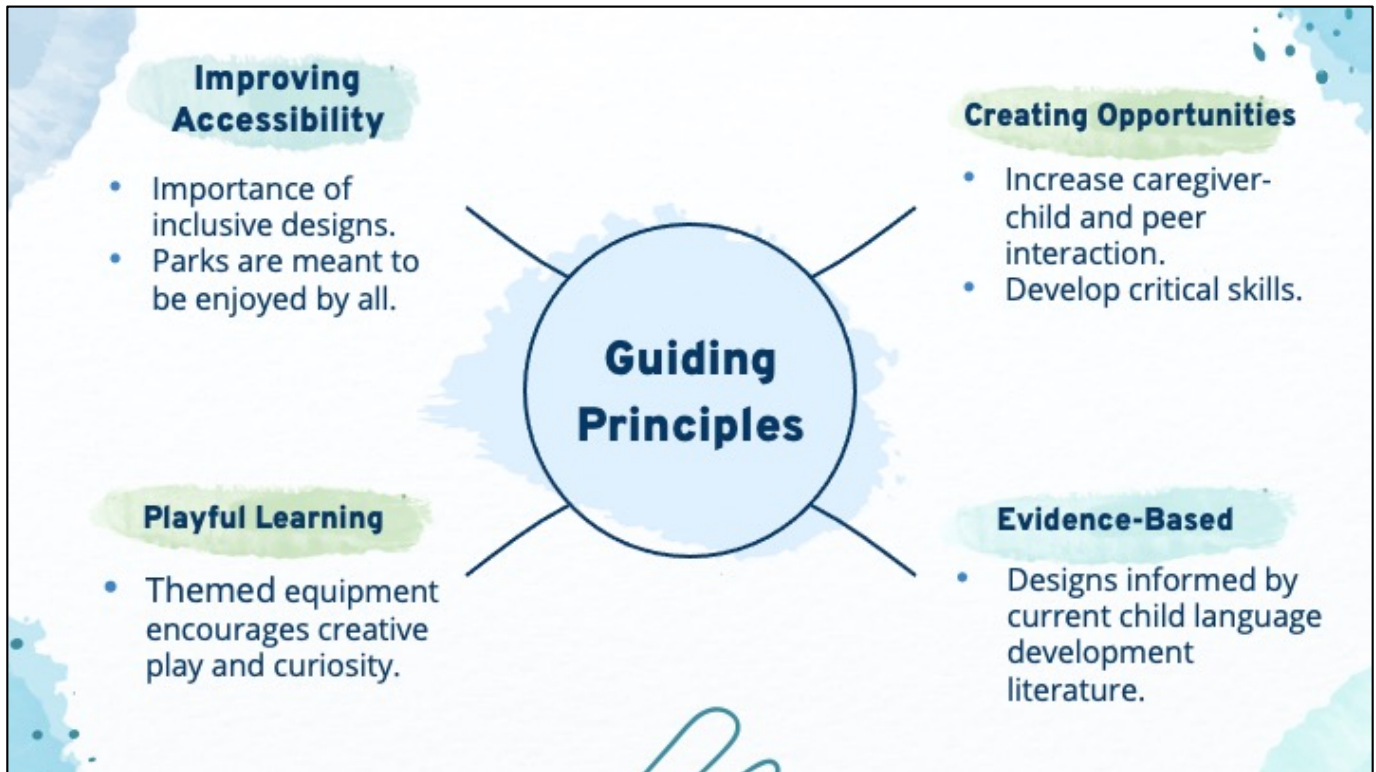
3

## Idlewood Park

### Prehistoric Era

A time machine into the past.

Oaten Park introduces some classic structures that facilitate language development, with no particular theme. Kinzie Park is a unique space-themed park, nicknamed celestial wonders for its magical aesthetic. Idlewood Park introduces a prehistoric theme, allowing children to take a time machine into the past.



As we developed structures for all the parks, we operated on four core objectives:

We wanted to create an inclusive and accessible park that contributes to language development for young children across a variety of cultures and developmental levels.

Secondly, we wanted to simultaneously increase opportunities for caregivers and children to interact and converse meaningfully, while also allowing for self-directed and peer-directed facilitation of language development and well-deserved rest time for caregivers.

We also wished to design this park in a way that moved away from deficit-oriented narratives, and not view any families as inherently lacking any language skills or developmental capabilities. We also want to design this park around principles that take into account more culturally diverse principles.

Finally, we want this park to provide many opportunities for shared narrative co-construction, and allow all members of a family to engage with the same structures and events, leading to conversations where all members take part, aiding child language development.



## Oaten Park

Classic Park



**Landscaping**



**Playground Equipment**



**Activity Panels**

Oaten Park introduces some classic structures found in many different parks, and in general we wanted to focus on fun playground activities that lead to unstructured, developmentally rich play. Our suggestions for this park include landscaping and visual elements, more engaging playground equipment, and activity panels for children to use in fun ways. All of these lead to a wide variety of play that suits many families needs, and will make the park more appealing to all.



# Unstructured Play and Landscape

- Unstructured play is important for language development
- Activity structures stenciled in on path
- Mazes, images, physical games, all facilitate play and make park more appealing
- Mural to showcase community art or add imagery to park



Children do not need concrete, structured ideas to engage in play that promotes imagination and language development. A child can take a simple concept such as “a plane” and turn it into play by running around pretending to be one, retelling stories of their experiences on a plane, and using sounds and hand gestures to engage themselves. The self-guided, natural play is an important aspect, and we wish to facilitate it in this park.

One of the things we wish to do is pave the central walkway and adorn it with several activities or games children could use for play. This could be a variety of things depending on what the community would need most. Games like hopscotch or maze patterns could be used to let children play with slightly predetermined activities, while still allowing for great opportunities to flex creativity. Different patterns or drawings could also be portrayed on the pathway. This could facilitate pretend play with the concepts shown (like an airplane) or simple conversation, both of which would facilitate more conversation between parent and child. This will also allow for a variety of styles of communication to be used in any family. This also serves the additional, important purpose of making the park more accessible to people with mobility or pain issues. The park currently lacks any smooth ground easy to navigate for wheelchairs or crutches (etc) and this change would give a useful inroad in for parents or children who need it. Alongside the path, we

would suggest adding a mural which could be used to showcase art, community projects, and similar ideas. This would give a great jumping off point for many quality conversations between parent and child. This could facilitate a great deal of direct conversation, rather than incidental talk while a child is playing. The amount of speech directed at children, taking turns in conversation, and a larger variety of words have all been found to aid development, which the topics depicted by a mural could facilitate.

Image Credit:

<https://www.stencilease.com/products/traditional-square-hopscotch>

<https://dribbble.com/stories/2019/07/29/36-strikingly-beautiful-mural-art-shots-to-inspire-you>

## Playground Structures

- Swings

- Seating arrangements around the swings
- Placing multiple seats on a swing set

- Expression Swing Universal

- Accessibility focused
- Opportunities for interactions

- Main structure

- Multi-elements



For the playground structures, we choose to replace the current swings with these swing sets that includes more seats and with seats that focused on accessible concerns. These swing sets would be a great opportunity to encourage more talks, interactions, and conversations between children and caregivers, and also create a unique and memorable play experience for them. More seating can be included surrounding the swing sets for caregivers to sit. The expression swing universal is a two person swing with an accessible design, creating opportunities for everyone to enjoy the benefits of swings regardless of their age or ability. The swing can be used by two children, caregiver and child, younger and older children and those with mobility issues. For the main structure, we want to utilize bright and captivating colours and incorporate multiple play elements such as slides, tunnel, climbers, sensory play panels etc. to create an opportunity for children to have fun and also being able to provide a chance for them to interact and play with others.

Image Credit:

<https://www.playlsi.com/en/commercial-playground-equipment/playground-components/5-arch-swing-frame2/>

<https://playgroundexperts.com/products/expression-swing-universal-with-solo-swing-frame>

[https://www.playlsi.com/493972/contentassets/d6aa3206b1d84886a318cde8f74e0da3/221292-5-inch-arch-swing\\_screen.jpg](https://www.playlsi.com/493972/contentassets/d6aa3206b1d84886a318cde8f74e0da3/221292-5-inch-arch-swing_screen.jpg)

## Playhouse & Activity Panel

- Fun
- Pretend play
- Interaction and cooperation



We would like to put a playhouse in the park too. The playhouse would be a great opportunity for children to engage in pretend play. They can use whatever material they can find or bring, a small rock can be a car or a plane. By engaging and inviting other children, they can also learn how to cooperate, share, and take turns. Beside the playhouse, we would like to include an activity panel as well. As you can see, the activity panel is comprised of various different games that can facilitate children's problem-solving abilities, abstract thinking, hand-eye coordination etc. The semi-enclosed shape of the activity panel also forms a mini playground for children to engage in pretend play using the games on the panel, or they can also work with a partner or form group to solve one puzzle together.

Image Credit:

<https://www.kompan.com/play/freestanding-play/playhouses-and-themed-play/villa-playhouse>

[https://www.aaastateofplay.com/media/catalog/product/cache/506548c7e38f23380be82b2ba7543234/9/0/902-880\\_kiddie\\_corral\\_14263.jpg](https://www.aaastateofplay.com/media/catalog/product/cache/506548c7e38f23380be82b2ba7543234/9/0/902-880_kiddie_corral_14263.jpg)





## **Kinzie Park**

Celestial Wonders



**Playground Equipment**



**Characters**



**Quiet Area**

For Kinzie Park, we built off the fact that children are naturally curious and enjoy exploring their environment by deciding to go with a space theme. Poured rubber will be used as the main play surface for safety concerns but also because it allows for additional details to be included such as paths connecting the structures, ground activities and embellished stars, planets and rockets for a pop of colour. The park will include several space themed equipment, including story boards with characters children can relate to, as well as an integrated quiet area.

## Playground Structures

- Builds on children's natural curiosity
- Rockets orbiting the space station

Variety of structures



We propose that rocket climbers and riders be placed around the perimeter of the play area to represent them being in orbit. At the centre of the playground we imagined a larger climbing structure that would serve as a space station. Many of the structures also include built-in activities panels featuring space theme vocabulary and sensory tasks, giving children more to do in the park as well as serve as a base for imaginative play. As you can see from the pictures, the structures in this park will provide children with varying degrees of challenge and stimulation meaning that children of all ages and abilities can go on a space adventure in Kinzie Park if they want to.

Image Credit:

[www.bciburke.com/our-products/product/nucleus-nu-2439](http://www.bciburke.com/our-products/product/nucleus-nu-2439)

<https://groundsforplay.com/p/space-shuttle>

<https://www.playlsi.com/en/commercial-playground-equipment/playgrounds/crab-trap-with-slidewinder2/>

<http://www.gametime.com/products/Rocket-Ship-7075>

[http://space1.com/Museum\\_Exhibits/Control\\_Panels/Space1der\\_Panel/spac](http://space1.com/Museum_Exhibits/Control_Panels/Space1der_Panel/spac)

[e1der\\_panel.html](#)

## Relating to Characters

- Space-themed characters children can relate to
- Develops emotional comprehension and perspective-taking
- Could be implemented as an activity panel, or as a painting/mural



Using a graphic activity panel, we decided to integrate space-themed characters. Our hope is that this gives children characters and storylines to relate to, helping to develop their own emotional comprehension and understanding of other people's perspectives. This panel may incite children to ask questions about, create related stories, or think about their own emotional states and how they relate. They may ask themselves or a peer, "why is the alien in the corner sad?", which may lead to a story about how the alien is lonely living on a planet all by himself with no friends to play with.

This element of relating to characters could be implemented in multiple ways – as a painting or mural, or as an activity panel. To make the panel even more interactive, the lonely alien could be moved by the rocket ship to happily rejoin the aliens on the other planet.

Image Credit:

[https://www.google.com/search?q=sad+alien+on+a+planet+cartoon&tbm=isch&ved=2ahUKEwjhmKajpoz3AhWAsXIEHVb2D90Q2-cCegQIABAA&oq=sad+alien+on+a+planet+cartoon&gs\\_lcp=CgNpbWcQAzoHCCMQ7wMQJ1CzBlimCWC7CmgAcAB4AIABalgBggOSAQMyLjKYAQCgAQGgAQtnD3Mtd2l6LWltZ8ABAQ&sclient=img&ei=sUVUYqH8BYDjytMP1uy\\_6A0&bih=756&biw=1437&rlz=1C5CHFA\\_enCA762CA762#imgrc=Vx6OLWHCVX](https://www.google.com/search?q=sad+alien+on+a+planet+cartoon&tbm=isch&ved=2ahUKEwjhmKajpoz3AhWAsXIEHVb2D90Q2-cCegQIABAA&oq=sad+alien+on+a+planet+cartoon&gs_lcp=CgNpbWcQAzoHCCMQ7wMQJ1CzBlimCWC7CmgAcAB4AIABalgBggOSAQMyLjKYAQCgAQGgAQtnD3Mtd2l6LWltZ8ABAQ&sclient=img&ei=sUVUYqH8BYDjytMP1uy_6A0&bih=756&biw=1437&rlz=1C5CHFA_enCA762CA762#imgrc=Vx6OLWHCVX)

TshM

<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/382243087106928129/>



## Quiet Area

- Suggested by parents
- Separate but not isolated
- Helps children self regulate
- Increases accessibility and inclusion



When considering elements to include in Kinzie Park we asked parents for their input, a common request was having a designated quiet area that still felt as if it was a part of the park. After considering how to incorporate this we decided to use the boulders to create an asteroid belt to create a separate area for children and caregivers to use. We see this area as a place for children to be able to take a break from the park and talk to their families about what is happening. Being able to self soothe and regulate, as well as communicate needs are important skills and having a quiet area in the park creates the opportunity for children to learn how to manage their emotions without having to leave or feeling like they are on a time out/in trouble.

This area also improves the overall accessibility of the playground because in similar ways that young children can easily get overwhelmed neurodiverse children tend to experience sensory overload and without having a less stimulating area they may not be able to self soothe and stay at the park. Many children tend to struggle with executive functions such as emotion regulation, problem solving and understand other's perspectives so this area will hopefully allow for these children to be remain at the park while they calm down then have conversations about these things with caregivers instead of having to leave because there wasn't an area to do so in.

Image Credit:

<https://www.playlsi.com/en/commercial-playground-equipment/playground-components/wee-planet-climber1/>



## **Idlewood Park**

Prehistoric Era



**Park Entryway**



**Dinosaur Cut-outs**



**Dinosaur Dig Site**



**Natural Play**

Our design for Idlewood Park centers in on increasing the aesthetic appeal of the park with a variety of pre-historic elements. We wished to make the park entryway easier to navigate and more appealing, and in the park proper, we believe that dinosaur cutouts and dig sites will engage the imagination of kids. Finally, some poured rubber and natural play areas will make the park safer and more stimulating to explore and play in.



One of the main issues with the park is the entrance and the lack of proper cues to families that there is a play area. You can see in images that the play areas are well hidden from many angles and the lack of any interesting visual cues. It's a drab, slightly shady-looking area with poor angles of visibility, and for any of the following park improvements to see benefits, we will need to make the entrance easier to navigate. In light of this, we want to tackle this issue by bringing this entrance area in line with the rest of the park. Pathing cues could be added with decals of dinosaur feet in the shape of the provided image, providing signs of a park while also letting kids engage with it, in an artistic manner similar to the pictured tracks. The footprints would also display an implied path that anyone could follow, providing a good indicator of the play areas that may be hidden by the building. We recommend paintings or flat display boards with dinosaur images or related concepts of prehistory prominently, emphasizing the theme of the park and that this is not just some backlot to be ignored.

Image Credit:

<https://havingfuninthetexasun.com/2020/06/27/9-dino-mite-places-to-take-your-kids-to-see-dinosaur-tracks-in-texas/>

<https://onlydinosaurs.com/120-great-dinosaur-stuff-in-2020/>



Right after you enter the park, along the outer fence around the pool, we suggest these dinosaur cutouts with a blackboard or distorted mirror on the fence. Children can draw their imagined dinosaurs, colour the dinosaurs, or even write down the vocabulary that they learned about dinosaurs on them. These cutouts can stimulate and prompt children to be creative – they can also talk about or explain what they are drawing. Children can say "look, I'm drawing a blue dinosaur with wings". Caregivers and other children can also participate in this conversation and ask questions like "do the wings of your dinosaurs have feathers?".

Image Credit:

<https://www.etsy.com/dk-en/listing/736950016/large-dinosaur-shaped-sensory-pack-for>



## Poured Rubber Surfacing



To make the park safer and more accessible, we recommend that the current sand be replaced with poured rubber underneath the main play structures. Pictured on this slide, we have some examples of colourful and aesthetically appealing poured rubber that can be used to mimic the landscaping of the prehistoric era. Children may hop from stone to stone or go 'spear hunting' for fish

Image Credit:

<https://marathonsurfaces.com/marathon-galleries/photo-galleries/#slide-1-12>





To go along with the poured rubber, we recommend a "dinosaur dig site". This section will be boxed off as pictured above, with a sign and various prehistoric images including dinosaur eggs and fossils. These features will be added on to the playground surface as 3D poured rubber, with an enclosure to ensure that there is no tripping hazard.

To accompany this play area, we also have a dinosaur fossil rock – children can climb this structure or trace the fossil edges to discover more about prehistoric creatures and stimulate tactile senses. This introduces children to a unique fragment of history and potentially ignites a passion for the subject area.

**Image Credit:**

<https://www.amazon.ca/KIDWISE-Digasaurus-Activity-Sandbox-Excavation/dp/B007PUU4Y0>

<https://www.the4kids.com/product/small-theropod-egg.html>

<https://www.the4kids.com/product/small-ammonite-fossil.html>

<https://www.the4kids.com/product/excavation-sign.html>

## Natural Play

- Safety concerns
- Meant to resemble a prehistoric forest
- Encourages creative and active play



Using logs, rocks and nets for the main structures instead of traditional metal equipment create a sense that children are playing in a forest rather than just another playground, enhancing the dinosaur theme. The log trough is primarily meant for children to play with and explore. It can also function as a fence or barrier to prevent children from running off. Children are able to play on a number of different obstacles, challenging their physical abilities and encouraging problem solving, planning and perseverance as they explore the structure in creative ways. Instead of being a piece of wood, children can pretend that it is a fallen log and use it as a bridge and similarly, children can use the troughs as a delivery system to share water, rocks, toys, etc. Even though these are only two examples, the possibilities are endless meaning that the structure is not limited to dinosaurs and forests meaning that even children who are not interested in dinosaurs can still enjoy the structures.

Talking tubes are a fun addition to any park, children of all ages enjoy using them and by their nature encourage children to talk to each other. Whether two children are playing together or a caregiver and their child, talking tubes encourage a number of different types of talk in addition to simply creating opportunities for new ways to have a conversation. These are designed to look like trees to match the rest of the nature-inspired equipment and can

easily be integrated in to any stories that children may come up with while playing. The simplest example of how these could be used in a creative context is that one child is at 'home base' while the other is out exploring and they are calling their friend to say they found some fossils or need help.

Image Credit:

<https://duncanandgrove.com/playground-equipment/log-climbing-frames/log-climbing-frames-no-10/>

<https://duncanandgrove.com/playground-equipment/sand-and-water-play/log-trough/>

<https://www.gametime.com/products/Talking-Stump-38113>



That concludes our presentation. We appreciate you taking the time to listen to our ideas and we wish you the best of luck with your future improving of our local parks! Thank you!