



## The living environment as a playground

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Play, inseparable from children's lives, is crucial to their physical, social, cognitive, emotional and moral development. The living environment of the home, streets, public parks, educational institutions etc., largely defines and sets the boundary and tone for the people and objects that the child interacts with. The child's environment is made of furniture and objects of play which simulate the real world, serving as interfaces that enable interaction between the child and its environment.

Our project aims to understand the ecosystem of play holistically and integrate it into the living environment for children.

### METHODOLOGY

To conduct primary research, we used play as an icebreaker which allowed us to get qualitative feedback by the children's responses through various activities and games. We visited local community schools, homes, offices and parks in Ahmedabad to understand the ecosystem of play, firsthand. These activities helped us create a new framework for participatory design and research that used playing as a tool.

We asked children to draw or visually represent what play meant to them. In some schools, children were so accustomed to being instructed, that being given the freedom to draw without rules delighted them. We played 'Musical chairs' with children with seats of varying playful characteristics. Their reactions, being spontaneous, helped in gauging their preferences. In another activity, participants chose icons depicting environments, people and objects that they played with, and by putting these icons together, they conveyed their idea of play. This enabled them to reflect on their personal definition of play and its significance in their lives.

### OBSERVATIONS

Learning is not purely bound to the academic and a child develops a lot of his/her cognitive skills through play. Play is increasingly being isolated as a leisure activity separate from learning across every environment. In the schools and parks visited, the use of play equipment is restricted to 'free' hours. The equipment is not adequate or maintained and sometimes with space constraints, too large or unwieldy to move around. At homes, play items form a different spectrum of objects from daily use products. They are stored and used separately, and constrained by space. Play equipment often specific to the nature of the environment, cannot be used interchangeably.

### INTERVENTION

Our intervention seeks to make the environment of the child more conducive to learning by imbuing playfulness in the everyday objects that a child uses. By following an iterative process of ideating through sketches, illustrations, models and prototypes, we reimagined actions like locking a door, storing an object and switching a light on. This exercise culminated in creating 'objects of delight' using playful attributes of motion, colour, sound and texture - a shelving system that invites interaction through the principle of balance, modular components which allow custom space building, seats that reveal hidden storage compartments when sat on, a lamp that is its own switch. We re-imagined functional objects to demonstrate that playfulness can be built into children's environment to foster inquiry and learning into their daily routines.



