

ABSTRACT

Emphasizing the value of hearing children's voices, this study combined drawings, photo preferences, and interviews to understand the perspectives and experiences of four- to five-year-old children. Children were enrolled in a preschool with diverse manufactured, mixed, and natural settings. After identifying and illustrating their preferred spaces, children were asked about their favorite play spaces, kinds of play they enjoy, and the reasons for drawing or selecting certain photos. The data was coded for different settings (natural, mixed, manufactured) and cognitive play behaviors (functional, constructive, exploratory, dramatic, and games with rules). Children mainly preferred settings that offered challenging, diverse experiences, and learning opportunities, such as the trees, sand, or hill. They enjoyed height alterations, hideouts, complexity, adaptability, and changeable qualities in mixed settings that were composed of natural and manufactured features. Children emphasized how mixed settings provide opportunities for functional, constructive, dramatic, and games with rules play behaviors. In addition, children expressed their interest for exploring creatures and natural cycles in natural settings. Natural loose parts expanded the ranges of cognitive play in mixed and natural settings. The findings suggest landscape architects incorporate natural and mixed settings for encouraging a diverse spectrum of cognitive play, as well as exciting hands-on learning opportunities for young children.