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A Playground for the Future Gets a Nod From Present-Day Players

By ANDY NEWMAN

For all the fancy child-development theory and high-concept design behind the next-generation playground that the city unveiled this week, it did not take much explaining for the seesaw-and-swing crowd to decide that it seemed like a good idea.

In a city where the standard equipment often varies from playground to playground only in its degree of shininess or rustiness, the idea of a new world of play got the thumbs up from parents, nannies, baby sitters and children alike.

"I like the sound of it," Hilary Plattner said yesterday in Prospect Park, Brooklyn,

as she waited at the bottom of a slide for her 15-month-old son, Tiger Macdonald.

The playground, being developed near the South Street Seaport by the Parks Department and the theme designer David Rockwell, replaces slides, swings and other stationary amusements with things that children can move and build and create worlds with — sandboxes filled with blocks attached to ropes and pulleys, wheelbarrows, milk crates, gigantic cardboard tubes and the like.

The plans call for the children to be guided in their activities by a staff of "play workers." If the playground is a hit, the city

Praise for engaging children's imaginations, not just their bodies.

hopes to build others like it.

Several parents said the new park sounded like a good match for the way their children already played.

"He likes moving furniture around at home," Ms. Plattner said of her son, "so he'd

like this."

At the Ancient Playground in Central Park, Jane Penn, 41, a fund-raising consultant and the mother of an almost 4-year-old girl, praised the idea of a playground trying to engage children's imaginations, not just their bodies.

"For the last year," Ms. Penn said, "fantasy play is all she wants to do."

At this, her daughter, Evann Penn Brown, briefly stopped running and announced, "I like to dress up as a kitty."

Kasia Prostko, 37, a baby sitter and sub-

Continued on Page B5

A Playground Of the Future Gets a Nod In the Present

Continued From Page B1

stitute teacher who lives in Astoria, Queens, found the idea of not having to carry her own toys particularly appealing.

"It gets heavy," she said as she pushed her 13-month-old charge, Lucie Freeman, on a swing in Prospect Park. "You've got a stroller and you have to take stuff for them to play with. My own kids usually play with other kids, so they interact. But the more you give them to play with, the happier they are."

Up to a point, said Jerry Schreibersdorf. Mr. Schreibersdorf, 75, a retired printer watching his grandson at the playground of Public School 101 in Forest Hills, Queens, fancies himself an expert in the field, having seen 60 years of playground fashion come and go — from metal monkey bars to plastic-encased jungle gyms with bridges and firehouse poles.

"You always need new stuff for kids," he said. "What's new to one group of kids becomes the regular old thing to the next generation." But while Mr. Schreibersdorf said he liked the idea of open-ended play items like foam blocks, he cautioned

Michael Amon, Colin Moynihan and Tanzina Vega contributed reporting.



Lucie Freeman, 13 months, enjoyed a swing in Prospect Park yesterday. At right, Maria Lopez pushed her daughter, Nicole, in Bensonhurst.

against overthinking the needs of children.

"They don't need fancy stuff," he said. "They have good imaginations. They'll take anything and turn it into a rocket ship."

A few feet away, Elisa Barsoum Losada, 42, a mother of two and part-time antiques dealer, agreed.

"You don't necessarily need sails and water and boats," she said. "Not every kid wants to pretend they are a pirate."

Ms. Barsoum Losada was enthusiastic, though, about the idea of "play workers." She said that well-trained and carefully screened workers could help children develop manners, engage their imagination and, most important, provide an extra layer of security.

"I'd like it if they were almost as lifeguards at the beach," she said.

Bonnie Huarotte, 18, a baby sitter who came to pick up a kindergarten-

er at Public School 11 in Woodside, Queens, looked at a rendering of the project and made a face. "The parents are not going to know what to do with all that stuff," she said. "They'll need the attendant."

Eman Hammed, 29, a mother of three boys at the school, liked the old idea of stationary play equipment because it meant (relatively) stationary children. "It's going to be harder for me because maybe they'll go farther away," she said. "I have only two eyes."

And of course, not every child is ready to give up the tried-and-true pleasures.

"I wouldn't really go to the new parks," said Stephanie Mesquita, 11, a student at P.S. 11. "I like the swings and I like to swing up and down. It's the first thing I go to in the park."

But as Mr. Schreibersdorf pointed out, one child's old standby is another's abandoned discard. Marie



Photographs by Ruth Fremson/The New York Times

Chenoweth, pushing a stroller along a street in Bayside, Queens, said she hoped the new breed of playground would engage her older son, John, 8, who has recently discovered video

games.

"He's almost too old for most playgrounds now," she said. "He thinks they're boring. If it gets him out of the house, I'm for it."