

**The Developmental Benefits of Playgrounds,**  
**by the Association for Childhood Education International.**  
Review by Jim Sanders, Playchek Services Inc.

This book is more of a formal textbook than I would like, but it makes some interesting points, and backs up it's finding with some sound un-biased fieldwork and hands on studies. Consequently, it is a must-read for any playground designer or manufacturer! Those that are looking to invest their money in a new playground should also read this prior to making their design decisions based primarily on price and appearance.

Here are a few excerpts from the book that should give you an idea on how it is written, and how valuable it can be to you.

On the relevance of height:

*It's a matter of physics. The higher they fall and harder the surface, the worse the injury*

On children's propensity to climb:

*The best play things provide novelty, but experience reduces novelty and children seek new challenges by using materials or equipment in ways not initially proposed or expected.....Our research consistently has shown that children of all ages use virtually all components of play equipment as climbers, commonly in unintended ways.....Risk taking is a natural part of children's use of play equipment.*

On types of climbers found and measured:

*The most difficult (and most used by 3<sup>rd</sup> graders) climber was the trunk-climber, the least used climber (by all) was the climbing-pole*

On swings:

*The research supports the view that swings are valuable additions to playgrounds, promoting social, cognitive, and perpetual-motor-development. The available injury data on serious injuries relating to playground swings are misleading. (as poor maintenance and poor surfacing are dominant factors)*

On playground design:

*Most people who care about child development know nothing about design, and most people who design know nothing about child development.*

On the future of play:

*If people continue to see outdoor play as frivolous and inconsequential, the need to maintain parks and playgrounds in safe and enjoyable condition will also be diminished.*

My criticism: *(I just can't help myself)*

*No discussions on the use of colour as a play feature, or the use of imaginative play panels (ie, driver-panel, store-counter), or other imaginative play features like cars, spring riders. And very little discussion on accessibility and the benefits of inclusion.*