



Children's place in Samoan schools

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Master Degree Project
Master of Fine Art in Design
Child Culture Design
University of Gothenburg
HDK - School of design and crafts

22 May 2013

Acknowledgement

This exam project would not have been possible without the guidance and help of several people who in one way or another contributed their time and effort and thoughts in the preparation and completion of this study.

I am sincerely grateful to my tutor, Karl-Henric Klockars, for the support and guidance he has shown me throughout the project.

My utmost gratitude goes to Lemalu Faumuina Shirley S Auvele, Shirley Faleluafua Siomia Esera and family for their contribution to my final work. Without their encouragement and guidance this project would not have materialized.

I want to thank Wendy and Steven Percival for all their kindness and help.

Last but not the least I want to thank my family and friends in Iceland, Sweden and Samoa that motivated me and encouraged on this journey. Their guidance and support was vital for the success of the project. I am grateful for their constant care and help.

Thank you very much

Fa'afetai tele lava

Takk fyrir

Abstract

Apart from simply being fun, playgrounds can have versatile benefits; they can contribute to various issues like physical-, cognitive-, motor- and social development plus health in general. This thesis will focus on how playgrounds can serve as a platform for children to create their own community and a place in the school environment. Moreover it will tell how building a playground could work as an awakening and outward statement about children's place in the school environment.

In many primary school classrooms in Samoa there is a visible teacher-student hierarchy.

As a student in Child Culture Design I felt interested in researching children's place in the school environment and how it could be enhanced.

In this thesis the research phase will be studied and a special attention will be put on the conclusion that building a play space for children, that they could look at as their own, could enhance their feeling of ownership in the school environment and furthermore how it will affect the children and the society in general.

The portfolio will show how the research and development resulted in designing a playground and tell about the unexpected opportunity that unfolded when the design got built as a full size sketch through a community project in the village of Matautu in Lefaga, Samoa.

Although the initial outcome was to design a playground the project continued to evolve after the building of the sketch and resulted in a booklet on how to build a playground, intended as inspiration information that could be sent to all primary schools in Samoa.

Contents

- Abstract 2
- Introduction..... 4
- Purpose and Goal 5
 - The Issue..... 5
 - The Goal..... 5
 - The Purpose..... 5
- Research analysis..... 5
 - Classroom observations: 8
- Conclusion 11
- The idea 12
 - Playground – a balance in the school environment 12
 - Playground research and project results 18
 - The “final destination” 23
 - Everything is possible – but what is realistic? 23
 - The Playground..... 24
- Unexpected Conclusion..... 32
 - The booklet..... 32
- Reflections 35
 - The design issue 35
 - Relevance of my design proposal..... 38
 - Sustainability of my project and it’s result..... 39
 - Identifying and reflecting on my process, methods and learning results 40
 - Reflections on reflections..... 42
- Original Project Plan: Jan, 2013..... 44
- Reference list..... 47

Introduction

According to Webster's Dictionary Belonging is: To have a proper, appropriate or suitable place. To be naturally associated with something. To fit in a group.

Samoa is a small Polynesian country in the South Pacific. With the population of 190.000, around 70% of the people live in small villages on the coastal line of the two main islands Upolu and Savaii. The native language is Samoan although English is widely spoken and is another medium for international communication. Both Samoan and English are used in educational institutions.

After visiting Samoan schools during the years of 2010 and 2011 I noticed a certain hierarchy which I thought could limit the children's feeling of belonging in the school environment. I thought this could carry along other implications too. For my master project in design I therefor wanted to go to Samoa and research this alleged hierarchy, and what could be done to enhance children's feeling of belonging in the school environment.

When researching the field I found out that the hierarchy was at least partially a part of the culture and something that I, as an outsider should not interfere with, at least not in the classroom. The school ground on the other hand was an open space where teachers did not act with the children. I figured that designing and building a playground at a school ground could enhance their belonging in the school environment along with multiple other benefits. A playground could serve as a balance between the teacher dominant classroom and the free play of the school ground without risking the hierarchical structure of the school environment.

After further research on playgrounds, the environment and the specific situation I designed and built a full size sketch in Matautu, Lefaga. While designing a playground was supposed to be the final result the project exceeded my goal. I understood that designing a playground and/or building it in one place would not change much - but designing an inspirational booklet, intended for the principals and teachers of all the primary schools of Samoa could maybe do so. The booklet reached a sketch stage during this project but has already established an afterlife.

Purpose and Goal

The Issue

What I had noticed previously was that the teacher-student hierarchy was very strong and visible so my hypothesis was that children would feel out of place and only at school for the teachers' sake.

Studies have shown that students who experience acceptance are more motivated and engaged in learning and more committed to school. My question was therefore: How can children's sense of belonging in the Samoan school environment be enhanced?

The Goal

After observing many school grounds in Samoa and getting familiarized with the setting the goal was to create something that could enhance children's sense of belonging and for them to feel like they had a place at school. To design something that could show the students that they are valued and accepted. A design, that could either focus on the children's experience in the classroom, something that would increase communication and friendship between neighboring schools or something that could be implemented on the school ground.

The Purpose

As a project in Child Culture Design the main purpose was to find a way to implement the specific field of design to enhance children's experience of belonging in the school environment. To design something that would lead to the students having a more powerful stance and confidence around others and the school environment as whole. As a design project it would have a different approach to the situation than previous studies and therefore interesting to see how a designer could impact the situation in a positive way.

Research analysis

According to the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (MESC) (2007) The Primary schools of Samoa are compulsory for children from 5-12 year old and all children have access to primary and secondary education. Government primary schools are village owned and managed by school committees. The school committee is responsible for school buildings, facilities, such as equipment and furniture, and collection of school fees. The

Ministry provides and pays school teachers, school stationery and curriculum resources, assessment, examinations, teachers' in-service training and development. Students have the right to enter either into a Government, Mission or Private school. When students reach the end of his/her final year of primary schooling, he/she requires to sit the Year 8 National Examination to determine entry into secondary schools.

The research process was done mostly through exploratory research, such as reviewing available literature and data and qualitative approaches through passive and active way of data collection.

School takes up a great deal of time in children's lives; it should therefore be a place where they feel good. Studies have shown that students who experience acceptance are more motivated and engaged in learning and more committed to school. These concepts of commitment and engagement are closely linked to student performance, and more importantly, to the quality of student learning. (Karen F. Osterman, 2000)

Goodenow (1993) stated that the three main factors of belongingness are; positive relationships with classmates, teacher support and general sense of belonging. Of the three factors, teacher support was the most important predictor of both expectancy and value but peer support also contributed significantly.

More researches emphasize on the importance of the feeling of belonging and acceptance in school. Christenson & Thurlow (2004) argue that one of the reasons students decide to drop out is caused by a prolonged process of disengagement from school. They refer to disengagement from school as poor attendance, unsuccessful school experiences both academic and behavior, feelings of alienation, poor sense of belonging and a general dislike of school.

Furthermore, according to ESP (2007) some low achieving students drop out of school due to teachers' negative attitudes towards them.

Although a lot of drop outs in Samoa can be traced to lack of transportation (Lealaolesau Fitu, 2012), it is obvious that teachers attitude towards students and their feeling of being accepted at school can affect them greatly.

These studies all emphasize on children's feeling in the school environment. The importance of belonging could not be overstated and due to previous studies and preparation research a hypothesis had been made, questioning that the alleged teacher dominance in

Samoan primary schools could lead to students feeling out of place and not accepted as individuals. It involved the question if the hierarchy could lead to the feeling of being at school for the teachers and that it could limit self-expression. A further research of children's place would have to be done to find out if the school environment was giving them the support needed to feel accepted and belonging.

The most influential research part was visiting two schools on the island of Savaii. One was the Primary school in Sapapalii, where the main research was to observe the children during interval but an earlier observation had been made where one class was followed through a full day's activity. The second school was the Primary school in Faga where a group of children were interviewed to get a better sense of their feelings of belonging in the school environment. Furthermore all the other classes in the school were visited to observe teaching methods and classroom environment. One of the factors noted while interacting with the students was how they like being close together and in a group. For example how they felt most secure when they were all together in the big gathering fale (open house) outside the school building.

Few things that were especially noted during visits to the two schools, both in class and during interval included:

- Activities and free play
- Group formations
- Flow
- Teacher / Student interaction



The school ground in Faga

The children all talked about playing rugby, volleyball, netball and soccer during interval, but the observation showed that they did not participate in those games during interval those days the observation was going on. It is still very common for many children

and young people to gather and play those games in the afternoon. The children gathered usually in groups of 2-6 and ate lunch together, talked and played tag or other roughhousing. They would often find a shade to stay in, both before school started and during interval.

On the two school grounds that were visited no playthings were offered from the schools and no play equipment was on the playgrounds. Numerous other school grounds were checked out and play equipment was scarce. When asking the children why they thought they didn't have playgrounds they said it was because the adults thought they were too old. They also said that they would nevertheless want a playground and that they didn't think of themselves as too old.

In some schools a family members come during interval with lunch for the children, they find a shade to sit and eat. In the primary school in Faga they had made a rule to ensure that the children ate healthy, the family members of that school would bring home cooked meal while in the other school the lunch was considerably less healthy. Occasionally some of the parents or other caregivers sit around chatting until the children finish school.

Classroom observations:

Hierarchy

During lessons the students often sit on the floor in one tight group while the teacher stands by the black board. This makes up a very strong boundary between the teacher and the children. They are depicted more as a group than individuals. The students head can never go higher than the teacher's as a sign of respect.

From a western perspective, this might seem as a strict rule that distances the children from the teacher but in Samoa, respect is the cornerstone of the culture. Respect (Fa'a aloalo) is taught at a young age and then practiced in the society as a whole. This is an important part of the Samoan way of life or fa'asamoa as living in tight knit communities where everyone works as a big family it is important to show proper respect for everyone to live in harmony.



First graders learning numbers at Faga primary school

Teacher : Pupil ratio

One indicator of quality education is a teacher pupil ratio. For primary schools, the ratio is 1:30. Currently, only 49% of government primary schools have a teacher-pupil ratio meeting the ratio set by the MESC. These numbers mean that teachers can give less personal attention to each individual student and it's more likely to view the students as a group to leave no one behind. This could on one hand enhance the feeling of belonging to a group, but on the other hand limit the feeling of feeling important and appreciated as an individual.

Teaching method

Maybe as a result of limited individual time, the back-and-forth interaction seems limited. There is often used the method of repetition rather than an active conversation form where the students can question the subject and the teachers explain the how's and why's. This could limit independent learning and critical thought and problem solving but on the other hand it creates a sense of togetherness and support from the other students.

School uniforms

All primary schools in Samoa use school uniforms. The discussion regarding school uniforms in the western society goes back and forth but in this case it's interesting to look at the way how uniforms gather students to a group. The students, visually and materially, become a part of a group and belong to a certain school.

School Curriculum

The school curriculum for primary schools includes 3 hours pr. week for art or other self-expression classes. Today the reality is that limited recourses and time is being spent on this issue, depending on the specific schools. Only about 12 secondary schools have art classes.

Corporal punishment

Corporal punishment is prohibited in the schools and teachers can be dismissed for applying corporal punishment. Nevertheless, teachers' practicing corporal punishment is still heard of. Since slapping (or sasa) is a widespread form of discipline in the country it is difficult to determine when it becomes physical abuse and not just a form discipline.

Many researches have shown the negative sides of corporal punishment. How it contributes to feelings of helplessness and humiliation, lowers self-respect and affects children's cognitive development

Corporal punishment adversely affects children's cognitive development. Children who are spanked perform poorly on school tasks compared to other children (Straus & Mathur, 1995; Straus & Paschall, 1998).

Interval

School grounds were researched through observations at schools, in villages and through more informal dialog with adults and children.

Pastime activities are crucial for investing resources and time as young people not only play and have fun but are building up their life and survival skills, communication and language skills, leadership skills and building their sense of self-worth and confidence as they grow into maturity and adulthood. Many Samoan parents believe that time spent in games and leisure activities are a waste of time and that young people are better employed in carrying out household chores and activities that contribute to the development of the family. However, they will allow young people to go to Youth (autalavou) activities as these are connected to the Church and organized by the Pastor. The Autalavou therefore can be used as an avenue to promote educational and constructive activities to go hand in hand with spiritual life

Conclusion

One way to look at the school is that it's a platform for socialization. It's a place where one should be able to explore his or her place within a group, feel a sense of mattering, recognition and making a difference. Taking up a big time of children's lives it is important for them to feel comfortable and at home in the school. It is a place where children gather and it automatically becomes a community within a community.

I had my own theory about the outcome but luckily I got challenged by the answers which gave me a new perspective. The importance of fa'asamoa, or the Samoan way of life, in the Samoan society cannot be stressed enough.

One part of the culture that is always heard of when mentioning fa'asamoa is the word *fa'aaloalo* which means respect. Fa'aaloalo is huge in the Samoan way of life because the culture is built upon it. Most Samoans teach respect because it keeps their children disciplined and polite. Fa'aaloalo brings order through respect. Families are organized this way, and the society carries on this order. The village, in essence, is an extension of the family. Just as each child knows his/her own responsibilities in the family, each family in the village knows its position in the village hierarchy. Each family accepts the dictates of the chief just as each child in the family accepts the dictates of the parents. There is a hierarchy or ranking of chiefs by age and authority just as there is a ranking of children in the family.

Fa'aaloalo is more than respect. It is a way of living in a community with harmony. Living in such a tight knit community there has to be order and everyone must know their place, without it there would be chaos.

This presented a new perspective on the fact that even though the teacher-student hierarchy is very visible and strong –the students are very sure of their place in the school. The hierarchy might in fact push them closer together, creating an “Us” and “Them”. Gathering in groups is also common in the Samoan community and therefore natural that the children feel the security of groups and choose to stick together.

On the other hand, the attachment and belonging mostly adheres to their school mates and friends but not the teacher or the school environment.

To experience relatedness, student's must feel that they are worthy of respect and that the others in their group or social context care for them. Their beliefs about themselves

develop through their interactions with others. That means that if those interactions are positive and affirming, students will have a stronger sense of relatedness and belonging.

Referring to earlier researches the importance of feeling acceptance from the teacher can have a big effect on students belonging in the school environment. According to ESP (2007), the quality of teachers is partly reflected in their attitude and their social relationship with their students. Many low achieving students have dropped out of schools due to teachers' negative attitudes towards them.

An adult initiated project that benefitted children could show them that they are important and they would get a sense of recognition. By using the school ground, which is usually not used by the teachers, could serve as a balance between the teacher dominant classroom and the free play of the school ground without risking the hierarchical structure of the school environment. Through using the school ground it could even enhance the student's feeling of it being their own space opposed to creating something in the classroom.

The idea

Playground – a balance in the school environment

After taking a better look at the school grounds it was decided to design a playground that would suit a typical Samoan school ground. A few aspects contributed to that decision.

- A playground creates a specific place intended only for children, where they know they have a place for themselves to create their own community.
- Building a playground could communicate the importance of the children knowing that they have a place of their own under the wing of the adults.
- A noticeable loss of playgrounds at primary schools.
- A playground is stationary and consistent.
- Personal interest and earlier research in playgrounds and their benefits.
- A playground would create a place where children gather and share connections and figure their own place within the group on their own terms.

The playground would have to be diverse so different skills could be nourished.

- Self-expression could be exercised through pretend play, and both cognitive and physical skills would be challenged.
- This visual acceptance on children's importance and space in the school could hopefully lessen the threat of at-risk students' gradual disengagement and reduced participation with a more positive outlook on the school in general.

Schools, as authority and specialists in child development, could raise public awareness on the topic of child's place in society if they take the initiative to give children a place where they feel respected as individuals in the school environment. This could not only send the message out to the public but evidently to the teachers too.

If looked upon from the social sustainability aspect a playground could contribute to several different parts. The main goal would be to create a supportive environment for the children, which then contributes to the long term building of the society.

Assimilate knowledge.

A playground would both assimilate knowledge for the children and the society. The children learn to make up their own community and rules as they play in the zone that has been dedicated to them. Through play children can develop social and cognitive skills, mature emotionally, and gain the self-confidence required to engage in new experiences and environments.

Children learn from each other in play and attain problem solving. Furthermore they learn a lot about themselves and what they are capable of. The problem solving is of a different kind than in the classroom where they are trained to memorize rather than analyze a problem. Problem solving at a playground deals with their own child culture and applies to real life situations that happen at the playground. This could be a valuable experience for future obstacles in life.

They learn to express themselves and by interaction, they share their views, thoughts and knowledge with other children. This is an opportunity that is limited in the structure of most classrooms around the world and would be less likely to happen if they spread out in different groups. This also helps them to build up important social and communication skills which will serve them well in later on in life.

The village would make an outward statement that the children's welfare at school is important to the wellbeing of the society in general. This way they could inspire other communities to do the same and spread the understanding and importance of children's own place within the community.

Skills.

Through diverse play, children learn a set of skills: social skills, creativity, hand-eye coordination, problem solving and they train their imagination. It provides children with an opportunity to learn new skills and compare their skills with other kids. Children develop their unique skills and become empowered through their experiences. When they can exercise their own interest they could build up confidence and self-reliance that can help them grow. While in the classroom the children are a group, then the playground could strengthen them to find their own place within that group. Furthermore it could possibly help the children that have learning disabilities to find a ground where their skills are accepted by their peers.

The community would have to organize and plan the place specific development of the project. This would need their organizing and leadership skills which should be strong in a collective society like Samoa. The playground would be designed and adjusted to the local methods to motivate the villages to engage in the project and build it themselves. They could therefore use their specific cultural skills to build the playground without too much of external influence. The children could observe, help and learn the traditional way of building which would help keeping the knowledge alive in the future society.

Development

I believe that schools, as authority figures and specialists in child development, could raise public awareness about the child's place in society, if they take the initiative to give children a place where they feel respected as individuals in the school environment.

Additionally it will have huge effects on child development and as the children grow it will affect the society in general.

Health objectives

Obesity in the Pacific is a growing health concern with over 80% of Samoans, 15 yr. and older, being overweight.

Although school children are not included in the risk group, it is observed to be a growing problem. While many kids play rugby, volleyball and other competitive group games, it does not suit everyone.

A playground is a great way to get children to move around and be active. Active play helps developing balance, motor skills and flexibility as well as it builds strength and endurance in the whole body. To address the issue it was important to include various levels of physical challenge as I think it could encourage those kids that feel insecure on the sports field to run around and play on their own pace. The children in the obesity risk group might also not be able or willing to play competitive sports and having an alternative for them to still be active and mobile is important. A playground could therefore improve child health and physical activity.

Children that develop an active lifestyle are more likely to become active teenagers and adults. This would create a healthier community which benefits the society in whole on a large scale.

Participation

Being ready to build and maintain a playground requires an active provision from the school staff and the village which communicates outwards their viewpoint of children as valued individuals and how it can impact the development of the society.

A positive outlook can encourage more people to participate in the planning and building the playground. Being a collective society, people are used to gathering and working as a group for the grate of the community, this is a valuable advantage point for this sort of project. Research has shown that when a community projects turn out successfully it elevates confidence in one's ability to make a change and people become more willing to engage in other community projects and continue to develop.

The children could get inspired by the resourcefulness of the adults and develop a sense of self-reliance and inventiveness.

Children are often eager to help and their participation can be both educating and fun. As the work around the prototype has shown, the children will feel a great sense of pride to be able to work alongside grownups and create their own big playground. Children should not be used as workforce, but the ones that are interested could be allowed to participate in easier tasks under the supervision and assistance of the adults.

It can also be valuable to have the children participating in designing the layout and other site specific adjustments of the design.

Building a playground and being rewarded with sincere smiles and laughter should make anyone motivated enough to take on new projects.

Equality

For now the playing field is open for everyone – as long as they like the competitive sport being played at that time. The playground on the other hand is designed with different levels of interaction and mobility to address different needs. It provides diverse opportunities to play, to answer different levels of activity, it even has a place for those who only want to observe.

In the classroom children are on different levels, trying to solve the same problem – but on the playground they all have the same freedom to engage in play of different levels.

In most cases boys chose to play and hang out with boys and girls gathered with girls during interval. A playground would gather them in the same place and increase open interactions between the genders. Gathering at a playground can have a large impact on children's language usage and awareness of the perspectives of others. This would positively lead to tighter friendship, understanding and respect of each other as they grow up.

Accessibility

All primary school children in the community will have an equal access to the playground and benefit from it.

The playground being built on a village owned school ground gives it a free and easy access for the public. Observation of the full size sketch showed that even though it was not the intention, the site was also used during the evenings as a hang out spot for teenagers and adults alike, to watch the stars and chat. Older people liked staying around early in the morning to see the village come to life.



Enjoying the sunrise

Quality of life

One of the main reasons to design a playground for primary schools in Samoa is to balance out the hierarchy of the classroom with a playground in the school yard where children can feel valued and respected as individuals. A playground is a visual and physical sign that this is a place where children are important members of the society.

I believe that by balancing the classroom where the teacher rules and the school ground where the students rule, the children will feel like they have a place in the school setting and they will gather a greater sense of ownership in the school area.

The feeling of respect and belonging could enhance positive attitudes towards the school in general. I believe that with increased positive feelings towards the school, the children will feel appreciated; it will decrease problems and by “having a place” at school; hopefully lower dropout rates and therefore increase education in the community.

More education could benefit the community in whole and have a great effect on social sustainability in the area.

There is a long list that can portray the benefits of a good playground but it will first and foremost be a place where children come together to play and have fun. Being happy in a safe environment is a basic foundation of every child’s life, as it says in the Convention of the Rights of the Child, Article 31,

1.) States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

Playground research and project results

In a pilot study by the University of Salford it was found that the classroom environment can affect a child's academic progress over a year by as much as 25%. That shows how much the physical environment can make a difference. Focusing on a classroom could have been a possibility for this project but a playground would reach more children at the same time and create a tangible difference between "student's place" and "teacher's place". It still affects children's physical environment in a positive way.

While discussing if the hierarchy could lead to the feeling of being at school for the teachers and that self-expression would be limited it was noticeable that the schools had no specific place for children that could possibly balance out the dominance. With that in mind an opportunity arose to create a visual and physical statement that the children were cared for as individuals in the school setting.

At first kindergartens were visited, since they usually have some sort of play equipment. A principal was interviewed about her experience and the importance of shade, and good and bad material was discussed. It turned out that some days the children stayed inside because it was too hot to use some of the equipment.

Primary school teachers were also interviewed regarding their opinion on the importance for child development to have a playground. There, children would learn by doing and learn to find solutions by themselves.

Environmental issues

Many schools and school grounds were checked and they were most of the time lacking all play equipment, and where they had them, they were often donated, made from plastic and/or hard to maintain. It was clear that if the playground idea was to become something that could easily catch on it would have to be made so that the people in villages far from the city could build them without having to buy much of specific material or tools. The importance of making it from local and reusable material became clearer. It was a priority that the playground would reflect local values, ideas and needs.

Environmental issues are one of the developmental goals of Samoa and addressing them through play could be educational as well as encouraging. By minimizing external material it was possible to keep the cost down and at the same time be more eco-friendly. Using locally grown timber made the playground very sustainable and easy to fix if something would break.

This approach is also naturally the best solution when designing a playground to be made with local building methods.

Playgrounds in similar environment

Playgrounds in developing countries were researched online, and specifically the ones where the focus had been on local material. It was a good way to rethink some important points in relation to climate. That raised questions like:

How can I make a shelter from the sun?

What kinds of trees give the best shade?

What would it be like to use fruit trees?

Will it be used when it's raining?

What is the site like in the rain?

Where could water gather? (Important for mosquito control, rust and mold)

-And then there were questions that would never have surfaced if it wasn't for observing, like will the parents possibly occupy the playground as a source of shade?

Adaptable templates

In the beginning the hope was that after the project was finished the template would be given to one school where it would be built and then it would catch on and spread to other schools. Therefore it needed to be easily adaptable and expandable to suit different school ground conditions. It had to be flexible so a focus was put on developing an adaptable template. It had to be designed in a way that people could adjust it accordingly to what material and resources they had around. Maybe people would get discouraged if the design was too strict or needed tools that the village did not have access to.



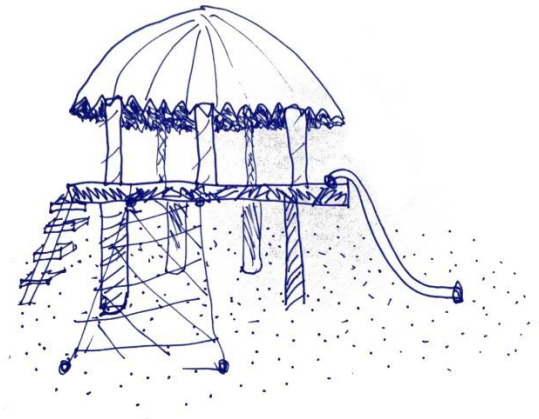
A Samoan fale

The Samoan fale was the starting point for the playground design for a numerous reasons:

- The fale is the archetypical house of Samoa.
- It is generally built using local material and local knowledge
- It is a common hang out spot
- A place where people gather to eat
- A resting place
- The fale is a perfect shade from the sun and allows the breeze to pass through
- A tall structure would invite an over/under play
- It could be built to give a double shade
- Building a play fale can tie many activities in a center point.

The fale o'o (small house): In modern times, the term is used for any type of small and simple *house or hut*, which is not the main house of dwelling. In a village, families build a *fale o'o* beside the main house or by the sea for resting during the heat of the day or as an extra sleeping space at night if there are guests. Many are raised about a meter off the ground on stilts, with a pandanus or iron roof. Most of the timber is grown in forests on family land. The timber is cut in the forest and carried to the building site in the village. The heavy work can involve the builder's assistants, members of the family and/or help from the village community.

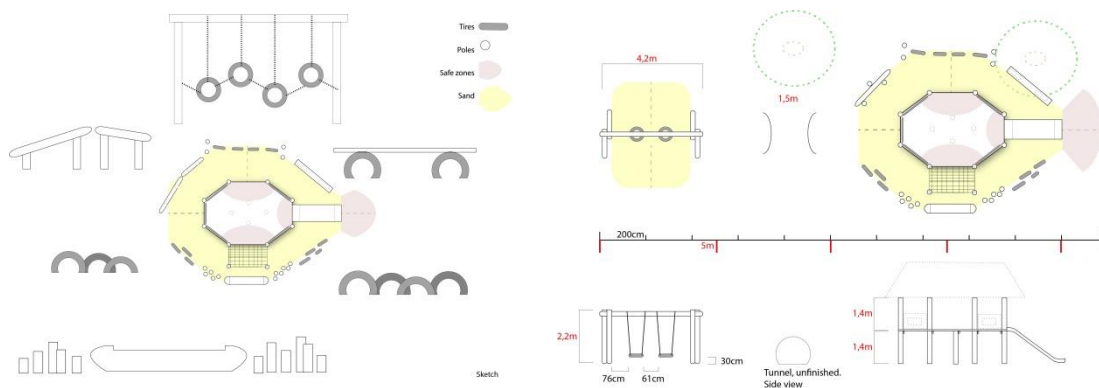
The design focused on creating a space where conflicting activities introduce could be introduced, like active and passive play. The play area had to give the children a place where they could express themselves through play, which research has shown happens a lot through free play and pretend play in particular. Social interactions should be encouraged in new ways.



The first sketch of a play fale

Along the sketch phase the playground developed from being just the fale with different challenging ways to get in and out to a playground with flowing movement patterns and an obstacle course to get you from place to place. A tunnel was added to divide the playground into sections.

The focus was quite much on making the structure in the most local way as possible for two reasons: To show the hopefully future builders that they could easily build playgrounds themselves and that they had the knowledge and didn't need funding from overseas.



The fale with a focus on the play-flow around it

The fale continued to develop and was broken up into two towers, which immediately made the space more dynamic. They got a bridge between them and one became higher than the other. This created even more contrast and the zones started to link to the towers and they split up into a sea zone and land zone.

Along the way more things changed, the obstacle course got more characteristics and themed zones started to form.

It was interesting to play with the norms and traditions from the culture and mix it with something new and playful. For example the way house poles are painted up to about 50-90 cm in one color, and if the rest is painted it's painted in another color. This ended up as an ocean under one of the fale's

Suddenly things started to evolve very fast. A family was interested in building a community playground in the village of Matautu in Lefaga. They had a space for it and were leaders of a youth group that could come and help building the playground. They had both local and reusable material and they good connections to the people in the area so it was easy to get help or reusable material here and there.

An opportunity like that could not be overlooked even though the design wasn't fully finished and a limited time was left in the host country. It was decided to look at it as a full size sketch and as it turned out it was the most challenging, educational and expanding part of this whole adventure.



The building ground in Matautu, Lefaga

The “final destination”

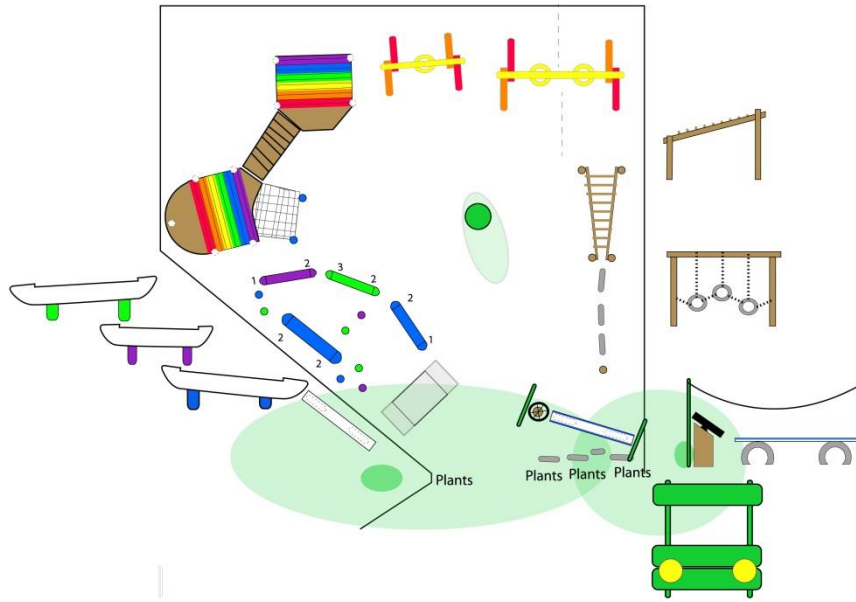
Everything is possible – but what is realistic?

On the site there was an old water-tank that got cut in two halves for the roof and since a friend kept referring to the arch as “the rainbow” so it was decided to follow it through and paint it rainbow color. The Samoan word for rainbow is nuanua, and since the roofs were such a big visual part of the playground it got the name Nuanua Playground.

The children were very interested in helping and all took turns to dig holes and cheered over the triumph it was when someone managed to dig up a “really, really big rock” with the help of a crowbar. It was wonderful to see how much pride and ownership it gave the children to hang around and help. During interviews after the building phase the children sounded very pleased with their playground and how they helped making it. They made it perfectly clear that this was *their* playground.

It was enjoyable to be able to involve the children in some of the decision making and therefore climbing up a step or two in the ladder of participation. The placing of the playground equipment was in main parts decided together and what colors things should be. Some children carved fish or decorated the shark. It was hard to set the line of how much freedom one should give for the user’s participation, but the objects already had certain color-schemes so often the children were asked to pick two colors that would go together nicely. The placing of the items was also divided in zones, but the exact position was chosen by the hands digging the hole.

Even though the playground was built as a full size sketch in the village and not a final product at a school ground it created an enormous field of knowledge and it made a ground for investigating what was easy, what was realistic and how it would function. With time it will be able to convey how things last and what are the strengths and weaknesses.



A sketch of the Nuanua Playground

The Playground

The playground at Matautu was developed as two different zones. A land zone and ocean zone. While developing the playground a few pointers were kept in mind;

- Create a space where children could feel that their play is valued as a meaningful learning and the importance of spontaneous play is recognized.
- Create challenges for them to work through and gain confidence and control of their bodies.
- Create a field for active exploration, thinking and reasoning
- Create a gathering place where they can develop working theories for making sense of the natural, social, physical and material world.
- Create a space where children can choose physical and social interaction according to their comfort zone with the possibility to develop and get stronger on their own terms.

In the **ocean zone** were boats and islands and a net to climb up to the first fale. (During further development that fale got influenced by a pirate ship.) **The boats** were intended to work in as play boats for pretend play and as balancing poles/obstacle course. They were designed to be positioned close enough to jump from one boat to the next and lean in different directions. The leaning part both looks as they are sailing through waves and it also makes the obstacle course more challenging. Between the boats there are short trunks made to be **islands**. Having two different elements in the ocean zone created a platform for many different pretend games and physical games where the children made up different rules for the boats and the islands. Boats are important to Samoa, where 70% of the population lives close to the ocean. Longboat races are also a common sport.

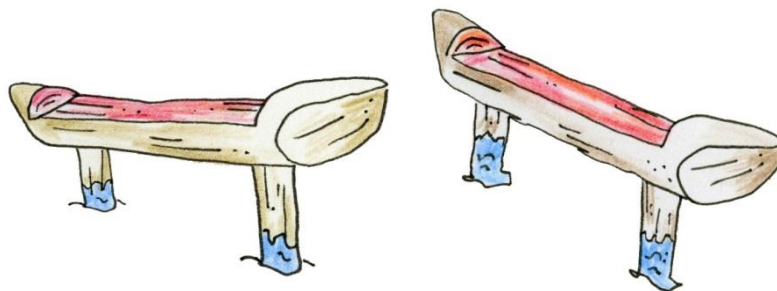


Samoa boat – Lana Kuznetsova

Additionally there were **loose islands**, pallets that the children could move around the playground to make new pathways. Those turned out to have no limits within the imagination of the children. One moment they were people, then islands, after a while they became a television and later a fence protecting the playground. Those islands were painted in different colors to visually separate them from the fixed ones.

The ocean was all made from wood found at the beach and around the area. Poumuli would be the ideal wood for this part because of its durability and strength.

All parts of the ocean zone can be enjoyed both in a group and independently.



Boats sailing around the playground



The end piece of a boat became a shark



Girls rowing a boat



Loose islands, fixed islands a boat and a shark

In the **land zone** was a big worm and a bus. **The worm** was first and foremost thought of as a physical play space to be used alone or in a group but focusing more on the motor skills of the children. The worm was made by using old tires and a funny looking part of a tree.



The worm



Children playing on the worm

The other object in the land zone was **the bus**. Samoan buses tend to be colorful, loud and full of people. Every bus has its own color and often some sort of a hand painted artwork on the side and/or back. A bus felt like a natural part to add to the land zone.



Samoan buses – Matthew Leal

The bus was mostly thought of as a pretend play area. It is a place where many children can play together and interact both with each other and with children in other parts of the playground. The bus was mostly made with old tires, wood from the area and a donated steering wheel. Two coconut shells were painted yellow on the inside and used as headlights.



A sketch of the bus

The design of the bus can also be altered depending on how many children will be using the playground. A longer seat or two rows can easily and without much extra effort invite more children to play together. Playing together on the bus can depend on verbal communication and the game sphere connects easily with the other areas of the playground.



King of the road

The fale is an archetypical Samoan house and an inspiration for the two towers that tie the playground together. As mentioned before they have many benefits and suit the climate very well. The fales were intended as an open ended gathering place. Having them on a raised platform created a double shade for the sun and an increased play space. Furthermore it created an over-under play and a different way of interaction.

The first fale is inspired by pirate ships with a blue tarpaulin roof and black and blue triangular flags. The forecastle shapes the triangular balcony and links it to the roof. The poles are painted blue as if it was sailing in the ocean. A piece of strong net should be fastened from the ground to the platform as a way to get up.



The pirate ship

The land part is a bit more directed to active play and interaction. A bridge connects the two towers but an additional way to get up and down is by a rope and/or a ladder on the other side of the balcony. The roof of the land fale is round, like a rainbow, and got painted accordingly. This is how the playground got its name, Nuanua Playground, as mentioned before. The back fence has a round profile to echo the shape of the roof.



Children pose in front of the land fale

Two holes were made in the floor of the fale and a pulley system was put up with coconut shells tied to a rope. This is a great way for an over/under play and specifically interaction. It is hard to play with this alone. It is a fun delivery system and a way to explore

the natural and material world by working with different weights. Two systems were installed, one with one wheel and the other with three so the children explore the different forces needed to pull up the same weight.



A pulley system created an interesting over/under play

Under the fale is a space with a small desk that can be used as a storefront. The desks have about 10cm holes in them to place coconuts that can be used to store different small things for the store. The coconuts can easily be replaced since almost every household uses coconuts for cooking, feeding animals and other things. A child-sized playful environment, made and encouraged by adults, should indicate to children that their play is valued as a meaningful thing and at the same time feel respected.



Sketches of the ocean fale and the land fale

A playground like this is a place where children can gather, share connections and figure their own place within the group on their own terms. It is versatile enough for children

with different capabilities to find something that suits them and creates a field where they can safely gain confidence and control of their bodies. It is a field for active exploration in many different fields and for them to move and be physically active.

Unexpected Conclusion

After the playground had been designed and built, with all the challenges and rewards that went with it; it got applied to an Impact Analysis Chart.

Would it affect the:

- ✓ Building place
- ✓ The village
- The district
- The island
- The country

Those results quickly led to a new brainstorm. The real solution to the problem was still out there. This whole journey had led me to understand the very most important next step.

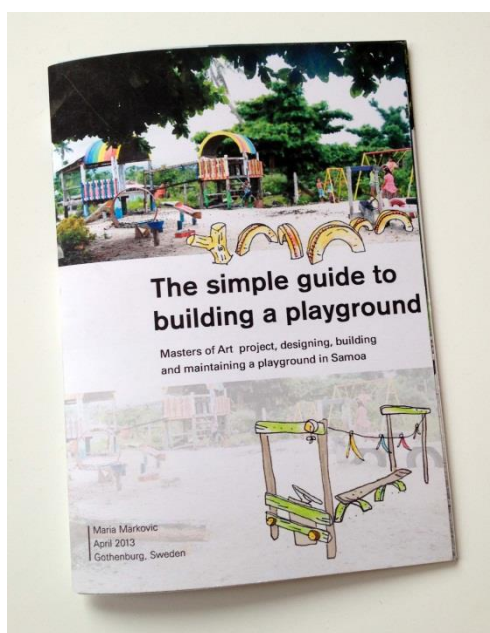
It's not in my place to build a magic solution at one school ground, but to create a tool to inspire people and spread the word. That tool, I believe, is a booklet on how to build a playground, a guide book to implement changes in the society for the benefit of the children. The only way for this project to grow and develop is to really hand it over to the ones that will eventually build and enjoy the playgrounds.

The booklet

This booklet is an inspirational document, addressed to the school staff to show them the benefits of making a playground. The document also has to be an inspiration to the ones building it and make room for the user's adjustment according to their material recourses.

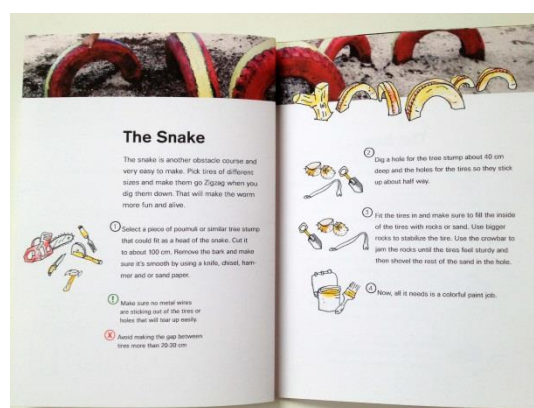
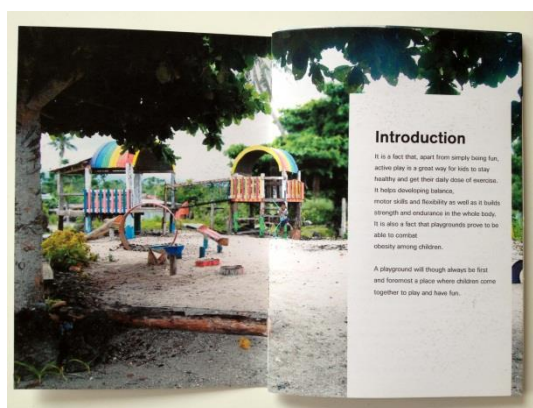
That is the only way to make sure that the playgrounds will be built for the right reasons and with integrity of the people in charge. It will also unquestionably leave the responsibility of maintaining and caring for the place in the hands of the community after my part of inspiring is done.

The booklet will help communicate to the teachers and parents that this is how they can make a space that could benefit children in the school environment in many different ways.



The first booklet draft

The booklet opens with an introduction about playgrounds and the benefits of playgrounds for the individual and the community. It then has a list of materials needed to build all the projects in the booklet and all the tools needed. Then the projects are explained one by one with a step-by-step instructions on how to build them and suggestions on how to alter and/or continue with them to suit different situations. The booklet has photos of the full size sketch, inspirational photos from the daily life and all the design drawings are hand-drawn to make the design more open for interpretations and alterations.



Inspirational booklet on how to build a playground

The ACEO of the Culture Department of MESC has already shown interest in distributing a booklet like this. In collaboration with her I decided that this could be

distributed to all 143 schools in the country –reaching the communities and encouraging them to start building. The booklet would be sent to the principals that would then take it up with the school committees, which then spread the word to the families in the village.

The Samoan school system, MESC and the communities

Formal partnerships have been developed between local communities including villages and districts and MESC. Villages and district communities provide the school buildings, furniture and are responsible for the maintenance of the school and its equipment. MESC appoints the principal and the teachers and pay their salaries and provide stationary and curriculum materials to the school. The principal is responsible for the operation and management of the curriculum programs conducted in the school however the programs and practices must be within the guidelines and policies outlined by MESC.

The unit of Samoan life *or the fa'asamoa* is the extended family *or aiga*. The extended family is headed by the Matai or chief. The Matai-'s form the central basis of the village administration. The Matai is responsible for maintaining family unit, administration of family land and other assets and representing the family on the village council. The legal system of Samoa recognizes the role of the Matai in keeping law and order in the rural areas and many disputes are handled by traditional or village Law.

As the villages provide the school grounds it would be in the hands of the villages Matai council to approve the project and assign people to work on it.

Next steps

Although the master project has finished, the project has an afterlife. I will therefore be in contact with a graphic designer and MESC to finish the design of the booklet. It will hopefully be printed and distributed later this year.

Reflections

Reflection A

The design issue

Research shows that feelings of belonging have a great impact on students' performance in school and that teacher's attitude towards them influences those feelings. My question was therefore: How can children's sense of belonging in the Samoan school environment be enhanced?

I believe that the excessive teacher dominant environment in Samoan primary schools can lead to decreased feelings of belonging and acceptance within students. Furthermore with few physical places assigned for children and little self-expression at school I felt the children could be missing out on the self-confident and self-worth that can be gained by finding one's own voice amongst a group.

While specializing in Child Culture Design I wondered how an outsider's perspective and a physical object could contribute positively towards this issue.

In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the need to belong comes very early, even before self-esteem. We can sometimes see that in school groups where children prefer to be in a "low position" within a group than to be alone. In the Samoan school system the teacher carries out a certain strong hierarchical model, derived from the hierarchy in the society, which leaves the children bound to obey to a structure every day that limits the sense of being accepted as individuals. In the Convention on the Rights of the Child it is stated in *Article 29* that the education of the child shall be directed to:

- (a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential

I believe that under the strong pressure of being a group it can be hard for a child to have a proper space and time to exercise those rights within the school environment. It is widely mentioned, in the field of interest, that children need their free time to play and have fun and develop through play.

My design addresses the situation straightforward by creating a space where children can explore his or her place within a group, feel a sense of mattering and recognition. Taking up a big time of children's lives it is important for them to feel comfortable and at home in the

school. It is a place where children gather and it automatically becomes a community within a community.

Schools, as authority and specialists in child development, could raise public awareness on the topic of child's place in society if they take the initiative to give children a place where they feel respected as individuals in the school environment. This could not only send the message out to the public but evidently to the teachers too.

This could lead to eventually changing the perspective of the society which would then look at children more as beings than *becomings*. Hopefully the view of physical discipline would change with different perspectives. This would not have to change the structure of respect in the society, but only strengthen the individual strings that together make a stronger rope.

I believe that an adult initiated project that would benefit children could show them that they are important and they would get a sense of recognition. By using the school ground, which is usually not used by the teachers, could serve as a balance between the teacher dominant classroom and the free play of the school ground without risking the hierarchical structure of the school environment.

I believe that by using the school ground the project could enhance the student's feeling of it being their own space opposed to designing something for the classroom which is a recognized "teacher's space".

After visiting many schools and driving past even more the lack of personal space for the students became obvious. The first idea was to create a space specifically for the children. In some schools the adults even had their own *fale's* to stay in while they waited for the children. The first idea was to build a fale with Child Culture Design in mind. Using motives and colors to indicate that it was their space but very soon it turned into a playground.

Most of the design process was dedicated to designing a playground when suddenly I got the opportunity to build a full size sketch as a community project. That was a very instructive experience and the playground developed further. It wasn't until I got back home and could see the project from a distance that I started thinking that building a playground would only benefit one of over 140 primary schools in the country. Designing a booklet on how to build a playground sounded like a much more feasible way to get the message across.

After graduating with three degrees from high school (16-20yr) in psychology, sociology and pedagogy, I graduated with a BA degree in Product Design from The Iceland Academy of the Arts in 2009. My next step was to work in the field of arts for a few months before moving to Samoa. There I worked for six months at Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE), after that time I decided to stay on and work at Tiapapata Art Center, teaching children and youth. In the summer of 2011 I got accepted to Child Culture Design at HDK. That education connected my previous schooling in with my interest in art and product design.

While living in Samoa I got the chance to travel around the two main islands both as a representative from the National Park, talking to school children about environmental issues and as a family member of my volunteer family. Being both a member of the community as well as an outsider I had a special stance from where I could view the society from a perspective. During my time in Samoa I gained families and with them there were children at a school age. Listening to their stories, visiting schools myself and talking to Peace Corp volunteers that worked at school I had a special insight on the situation.

When deciding upon a graduation project I felt that a further research in that field could actually result in something relevant. I could use my background and interest in social matters and apply it to my interest in design. I also knew that I had a support system to fall back on in Samoa and families and friends to help me addressing the research field.

I used several different methods to research the subject field, being mostly without internet was very good since usually I tend to use it much to research different fields. In this project the subject was very accessible and easy to find future users to interact with, as well as young people that were generous to contribute ideas on what they wished they had had when they were younger.

I also developed a new way of sketching where I broke things down to parts and could assemble and disassemble things and or whole areas easily. It was also a good way to get a holistic view of the area in question.

I felt a strong need to keep natural forms and work with cultural objects in my design as I thought it would give the signal that every village should be able to build the design at their own school ground. As it turned out, while building the full size sketch, the limited access to specific tools enhanced the reason to keep the design rather simple. It was still amazing to see what could be done with a chainsaw.

Reflection B

Relevance of my design proposal

I believe that the relevance of my design is fully applicable to the situation at hand. It will have a multiplier effect that exceeds the school ground and gives back to the community and surrounding communities. Social sustainability takes a big role in the project as I mentioned earlier and could hopefully have a snowball effect on children's place in society.

The stakeholders for this project can be divided in two groups, the users and the providers. The school children are the ones that will use the design and benefit from it in a more direct way, the school administrators and the village at hand will benefit in a different way. In the long haul the children will become adult members of the society and a new way of viewing the benefits of a playground has begun. The design was made with the local customs, culture, economic and ecological values in mind, not only the physical and form giving part, but the whole process on how the project should proceed and grow. The fact that my part in the process is not thought of as a single assignment to be built at a certain place, but as an inspiration for communities to build themselves can contribute to the self-worth of the whole community.

Regarding the children, the schools will benefit with happier, healthier children, they would furthermore be more in contact with themselves as well as their peers and the school community in general. The schools should see not only the effect on the children's sense of belonging but also their overall health, which is an important when it's a known fact that obesity is a continuing problem in the society.

I have already met very positive responses to the project from locals, children, principals and the ACEO of the Sports Division of MESC in Samoa, which wants to be in contact and hopefully publish and send the booklet to all government primary schools in Samoa. I believe that the shown interest derives from the lack of similar projects in the islands and that this is a pioneering way to address the subject.

It encourages local action to a local problem which is a valuable outward statement. It could furthermore encourage further action in other fields.

The idea is valuable and valid because there is a true lack of playgrounds at primary schools and communities in the country; my unofficial research suggests that less than 1 in every 20 primary schools have playgrounds. With growing obesity rates in the pacific islands

and the indicators that active children become active adults it might contribute to a healthier people.

There are many benefits to having a playground for the children, but is also a valuable factor for the individuals as well as the community to build it themselves. The children will enjoy playing freely and having a special space designated for them will reflect respect and an outward knowledge that they are valued members of the community. I believe that the feeling of acceptance will follow them into the classrooms and with more self-esteem they will be more susceptible in the classroom.

Reflection C

Sustainability of my project and it's result

At first the design solution was to design a playground for a specific school where it would benefit the children and in the long run the community. Later in the process it became clear that the final part of the design should be to design a booklet, telling about the benefits of having a playground at a school followed by a "How to build a playground". I believe that giving people the idea and knowledge is far more sustainable way of designing than to build the design and leave it there. It also encourages people to be creative in their own way and the responsibility of maintaining and sustaining the project will be in their own hands.

The **technical and ecological sustainability** holds hands in this project where it was emphasized that the playground would be designed with local and re-usable material in mind. This would then hold hands with the technical sustainability, whereas locals have their specific knowledge of the material, where it can be found, how it should be treated and how to work with it. Furthermore it could teach the children the trade in a fun way. Building a prototype in a village was incredibly important to the design and my way of looking at it. It gave me a better understanding of what I could expect in terms of availability of tools and how to use the material at hand. This was very educational and beneficial to my project. It also taught me what I could teach them and in what ways my personal input was beneficial.

The **economical sustainability** is portrait in the way it the playground is designed and constructed, that is; mostly with local material and local knowledge of the material. Being built as a community project will probably mean that the school committee will collect money for buying the tools and material not readily available in the community. This will mean that

the community relies on themselves and not on outsiders donating a playground (which seems to be common at the school grounds and kindergartens that have play equipment).

Over time the playground will start to wear out, this might even happen faster than I realize in this warm, humid climate. When it comes to renewing things and keeping them in shape it will be even more important that it is built with local knowledge and material. It would be hard to fix a plastic swing – but easily done to make a new wooden one, additionally the wooden one might be more robust and last longer than the plastic one to start with – just to take an example.

With a **social sustainability** perspective the playground could benefit the society in various ways though the main goal would always be to create a supportive environment for the children, which then contributes to the long term construction of the society. As mentioned earlier in the thesis the playground has a long list of positive attributes towards social sustainability.

The project in general could also be sustainable in that way that many other Polynesian islands have the same situation as Samoa. It would be interesting to research other areas and see if this project or a similar one could be adjusted to the situations in other countries. I believe that encouraging people to do things themselves, rather than waiting for it to be donated can not only benefit the adults in the form of pride but also create a snowball effect of capability. Specifically since the action is in the field of children they are more likely to notice the changes and be affected by the resourcefulness of the adults, they would then become role models in a new way and children would therefore get the mentality that they can make changes happen themselves.

Reflections D

Identifying and reflecting on my process, methods and learning results

Looking back on the project I have to say I learned a lot. Not just about designing an object but going one step further and ask what will it change in the future? Will it really have an impact? Working on a real life situation gave me inspiration and I realized that I could actually make a change in children's lives.

According to Ingelhart-Welzel Cultural Map of the World Sweden scores at the furthest axes of Self Expression Values and Secular-Rational Values, and according to the word on the street it is almost a taboo to talk about culture. Therefore it got hard at times to

get critic from there, but at the same time I realized how important it was to read the reality I was in and follow the flow of thought in a given culture. I couldn't just be an outsider bringing stuff that I thought was for their own good.

The culture in Samoa is at the very most importance.

At one point in the process I took a step back to reflect upon some questions, the most important one being if I was trying to design the past and if I was really pushing it towards the most adventurous and fun place for the children? Maybe I just thought the old ways of making roofs were charming because I had other options and something to compare it to, but after talking to local people they agreed with me that building it with the Samoan style (or *fa'asamoa*) was both the most economical way to do it and it could boost peoples interest to start building it themselves.

I followed up on my theory and got challenged by the answers I got. The sense of belonging in the school environment was definitely prevalent while the sense of being respected as an individual within that group was lacking. In fact the hierarchy builds so much up on this respect that children, being at the bottom of the respect scale, don't get much dedicated time to exercise their place as individuals. The reason for designing a playground was still relevant by creating a common space for them to engage in a free play on their own level of involvement.

I used a broader research method then I had before. A lack of internet access helped a lot there, and I spent more time talking to people in the society and students to get their perspective on things and former Peace Corp teachers to get additional outsiders perspective.

The project resulting in a booklet was an unexpected turnout and now a crucial extension of the project. Making a booklet is still, respectfully, a project for both me, as a product designer with a special knowledge on the subject, and additionally a skilled graphic designer. Graphic design is an important field of its own and should be treated that way. The next steps will therefore be to create a proper booklet to carry on the inspiration of building a playground, publish it in collaboration with MESC and send to Primary Schools around Samoa.

The whole project was a good lesson in making history and future work together. How to make a cultural thing with an outsider's knowledge and drive but still being respectful of the way things are done in the host country. A few of the details were made with a fun mixture of the two which are the parts I have the deepest feelings towards. Finding out how challenging it can be to make different languages work together was something that I didn't expect to encounter. Luckily I had some basic understanding in the language but it was a good experience in how to communicate nonverbally.

I learned how important it is to do a proper inventory, especially when working at a site that is hours away from any stores. Getting quotes from different places was a full process without internet and getting to know where the stores were and travel between them takes time in a new country. The distances from the building site to the nearest store had me working on my tendency to underestimate quantity of material.

It was very challenging to learn everything about the construction work on how to build a fale, and the hardest part was probably to take all the decisions alone and have the responsibility on my shoulders. Understanding the lack of tools was a relative factor in the design. Details often had to subside for that reason. The choice to build it using local methods deepened my understanding in both the culture and choice of material.

Building the playground as a full size sketch was an emotional ride and very hard from time to time, so I allow myself to be sincere and say that seeing the smiles and hearing the laughter when the kids finally got to play on the playground, made it all worth it. It was an amazing experience and hard to believe that I actually created something that brings so much joy.

Reflections on reflections

Reflections on reflections

The whole project was a constant **learning process**. It was challenging at times and other times it was a revelation. Being so far from the university, my tutor and my classmates made me feel more independent but the pressure to succeed was more since I felt I had made more of an effort to make this project happen than if I had done something at home. I learned a lot about the importance of a proper research, inventory and interviews. In a society where you are an outsider it is harder to adjust things afterwards.

I learned new tactics and techniques in sketching and I learned to take a step back and realize that the sky isn't always the limit and sometimes it can be more successful to design according to what is realistic, especially when aiming at people with limited resources to carry it through.

It was challenging for me, a person who loves the wood workshop, to accept that sometimes the only tool to cut wood is with a chainsaw and to understand that the best way to dig a hole is to throw the shovel away, get on my knees and start scraping away with a coconut shell.

It was an interesting thing to realize how much knowledge of the society in question can affect the design. I learned to follow my own convictions and embrace the importance of understanding the flow of thoughts in a given culture.

My **personal starting point** was over a year ago when I decided that I wanted to do a project in Samoa. I had lived there before and I felt that I owed it to myself and the communities that I had lived in to give something back. I thought that a design project that would benefit the children in the society could be a positive thing for me to strive towards.

A few different fields of interest went through my mind before deciding on digging deeper into the school environment. Having heard many stories of the teacher dominant situation and knowing that some of my friends' children would start school soon I wanted to create something to balance it out. To start with I focused also on the health issues and other things, but since that is a benefit that follows a playground regardless, I decided to lessen the significance of it during the research phase and focus on the situation at hand.

Original Project Plan: Jan, 2013

What is Samoan children's experience of belonging in the school environment and how can it be enhanced?

Is this experience of belongingness important in an educational setting?
Do students currently experience school as a community?
How do schools influence students' sense of community?



Maria Markovic
January 17 th, 2013
Child Culture Design – HDK

Why?

Self-motivated play is defined as "*What children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way, and for their own reasons*". Playgrounds provide opportunity and a common space for children to gather for this kind of play. It differs from the structured play of recess or organized sports and games in a way that free play allows the child to explore according to his or her own natural tendencies, and allows them to learn from one another.

In the islands of Samoa lives a very happy and caring nation, but being a developing country it does not have the same opportunities as we do to work specifically in the field of child culture design. I would like to get the chance to use my specific education, skills and capability to work with and for the children in this area, building a bridge of academic exchange between these two opposite continents of the earth.

For whom?

While living in Samoa I got the chance to travel around the two main islands both as a representative for the National Park, talking to school children about environmental issues and as a family member of my volunteer family. In my travels I saw many schools and school yards but noticed that they were in 90% of the time lacking all play equipment.

It is a fact that, apart from simply being fun, active play is a great way for kids to stay healthy and get their daily dose of exercise. It is also a fact that playgrounds prove to be able to combat obesity among children. This is an important fact since obesity in the Pacific is a growing health concern with over 80% of Samoans, 15 yr. and older, being overweight.

Luckily we know that children, who are used to spending free time playing, are more likely to grow up to be physically active teenagers and adults, and that is something I can contribute to with my interest and education in that field.

What? Objectives/goals?

As a response to the lack of playground equipment I want to design a playground at a school yard where the children can play self-motivated games and engage in free play. It will motivate children to be physically active, even the ones that cannot take part, or are not interested in the organized sports and games.

After mastering a playground skill and experiencing the triumphant feeling of "I did it!" a child can easily achieve a boost in his or hers self-confidence, leading to greater explorations in the child's own physical limits, trying to exceed itself and in time become more and more self-confident and healthy. This might play an important role in the battle of obesity on the island.

A playground will still be first and foremost a place where children come together to play and have fun. Being happy in a safe environment is a basic foundation of every child's life, as it says in the Convention of the Rights of the Child, Article 31,

1.) States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

In addition to these goals I would like to make the playground as much as I can from recycled and re-useable material, instigating an environmental mindset, which is one of the Millennium Development Goals of Samoa.

Project

My key words being: *simple, inexpensive, open-ended* playthings, the project will result in a playground at a primary school in Samoa. My main focus will be on having it safe but challenging and encouraging children to engage in free play.

The project is also tightly knit to environmental issues where I want to promote re-using material and recycling. I find it very important to use local material and methods, so the playground can easily be maintained in the future. It can then also be an inspiration for other schools and villages to start building playgrounds in their own villages.

Using local material and methods will serve as an academic exchange for both parties and deepen my understanding in both the culture and choice of material.

I would also like to research the local factories and see if there is any consistent waste material that could be used both in this project and then continually develop it into new usage in other places.

Work Plan!

This project will start in January 2013 by following up on a research I already made for a playground project in the spring of 2012 and also by researching playgrounds in other developing country where the focus has been local material. I will also research play in rural areas and specifically site specific solutions, since the playground might have to depend greatly on the material and the ground in question. Before leaving to Samoa I would have ready some basic sketches, approved by my supervisors both here and in Samoa to make sure the project is on the right track. Those supervisors are; Karl-Henric Klockars, designer and lecturer at HDK, Gothenburg and Wendy Percival, Art teacher at Phillips Academy, Andover and the principal at Tiapapata Art Centre, Samoa.

21

Since the time frame will be tighter than I expected I will not be able to build the project like I hoped for, but never the less I will make drawings and models which might even be better since that will give me more flexibility to observe and research more schools which might lead to my design being built in more schools in the future.

Next up is researching the local factories and talk to the Ministry of Natural Recourses and Environment to hear their input on using re-usable material, and where to access it safely. I might have to do some experimental time if I find interesting material.

I will also have to get in contact with local, traditional Fale builders (Cultural gathering houses), carvers and the local women's comity to get tips on weaving Pandanus leaves, especially if I plan to design roofing.

Before, meanwhile, and after I will meet with the children, talk to them and hold small workshops on what they would like to see on their school ground. This might be a very interesting research since the children in rural villages have never been to a western playground and possibly never seen such a thing.

With all this new material it will be time to redefine my sketches and adopt them to my new discoveries and information. The design phase and work drawings will be followed by my Swedish and Samoan supervisors that I will stay in regular contact with.

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Appendix 1



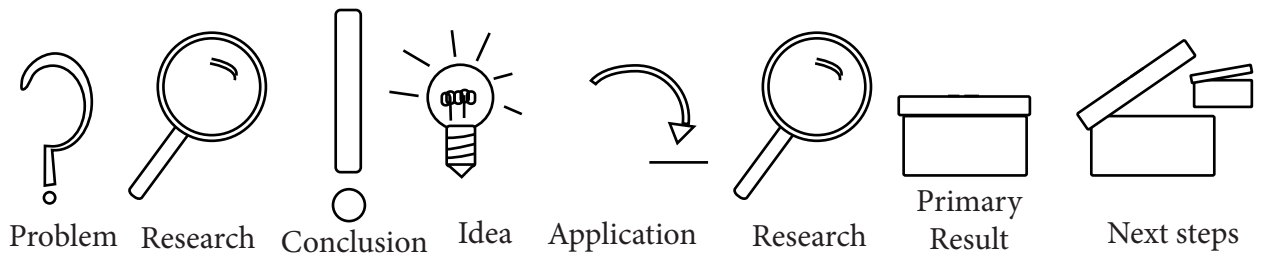
Children's place in Samoan primary schools

Master Degree Project
Spring 2013
HDK, GU

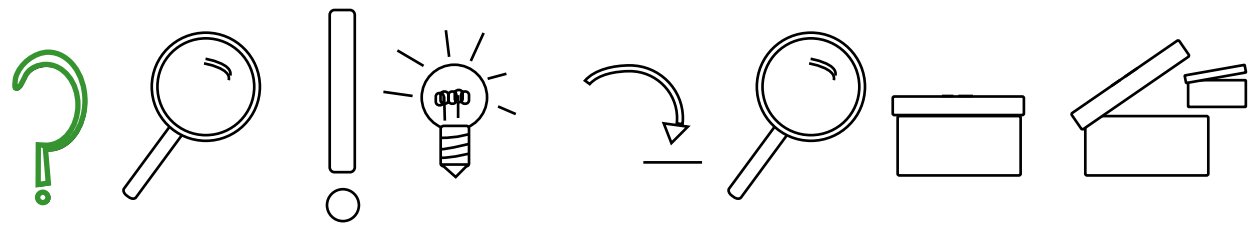
Introduction

Samoa is a small Polynesian country in the South Pacific. With the population of 190.000, around 70% of the people live in small villages on the coastal line of the two main islands Upolu and Savaii. The native language is Samoan although English is widely spoken and is another medium for international communication. Both Samoan and English are used in educational institutions.

According to Webster's Dictionary Belonging is: To have a proper, appropriate or suitable place. To be naturally associated with something. To fit in a group.



The issue



Goodenow (1993) stated that the three main factors of belongingness are; positive relationships with classmates, teacher support and general sense of belonging. Of the three factors, teacher support was the most important predictor of both expectancy and value but peer support also contributed significantly.

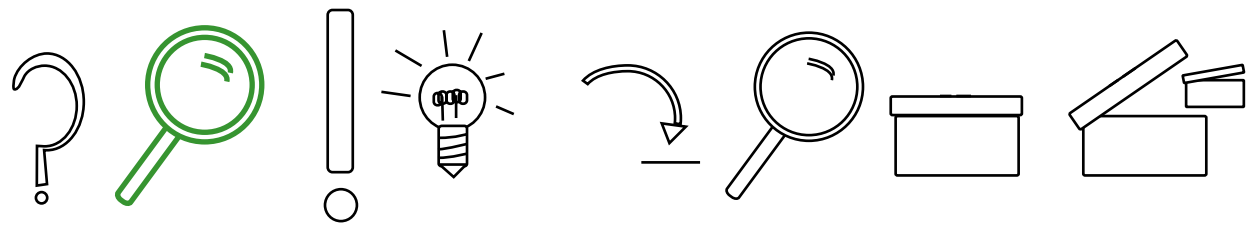
Studies have shown that students who experience acceptance are more motivated and engaged in learning and more committed to school. These concepts of commitment and engagement are closely linked to student performance, and more importantly, to the quality of student learning. (Karen F. Osterman, 2000)

The teacher-student hierarchy at Samoan primary schools seems to be very strong which might contribute to children feeling out of place and being at school for the teachers.

So, my reaserch question is; How can children's sense of belonging in the Samoan school environment be enhanced?



Issue Research



According to the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (MESC) (2007) The Primary schools of Samoa are compulsory for children from 5-12 year old and all children have access to primary and secondary education. Government primary schools are village owned and managed by school committees. The school committee is responsible for school buildings, facilities, such as equipment and furniture, and collection of school fees. The Ministry provides and pays school teachers, school stationery and curriculum resources, assessment, examinations, teachers' in-service training and development

A few different research methods were used to gather information. The most influential part was observation at two primary schools and assessing things like:

Hierarchy

Teacher : Pupil ratio

Teaching method

School uniforms

Corporal punishment

Interval

Activities and free play

Group formations

Flow

Books and published articles regarding the subject

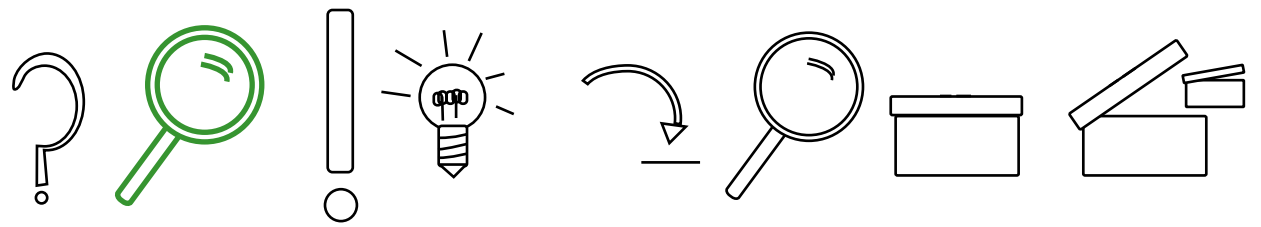
What children need to feel a sense of belonging

What effect belonging has on school performance

What are the at-risk zones

The society in general

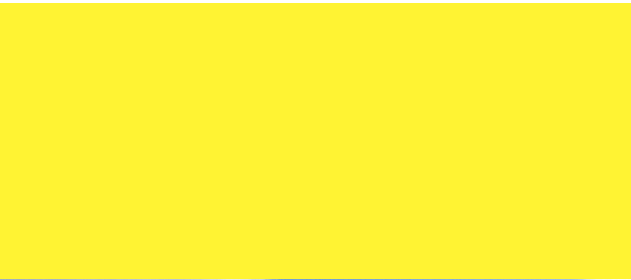
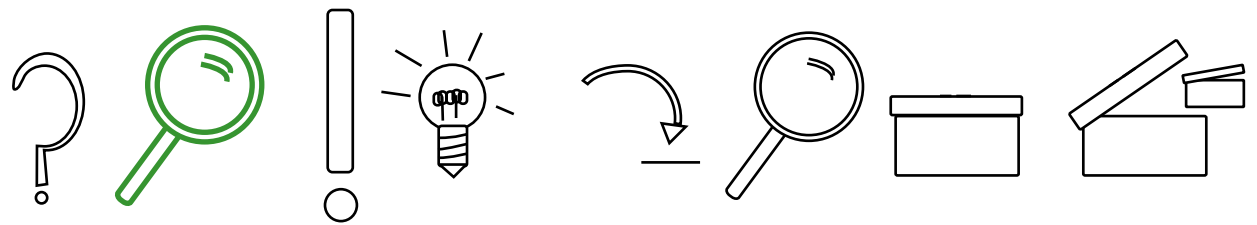
Issue Research



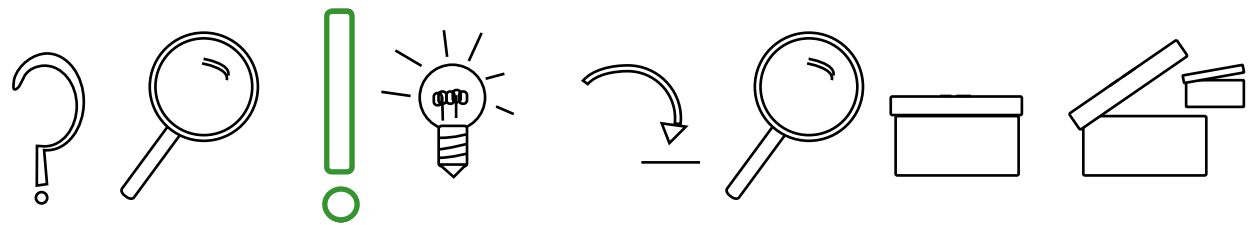
School ground during interval



Issue Research



Conclusion

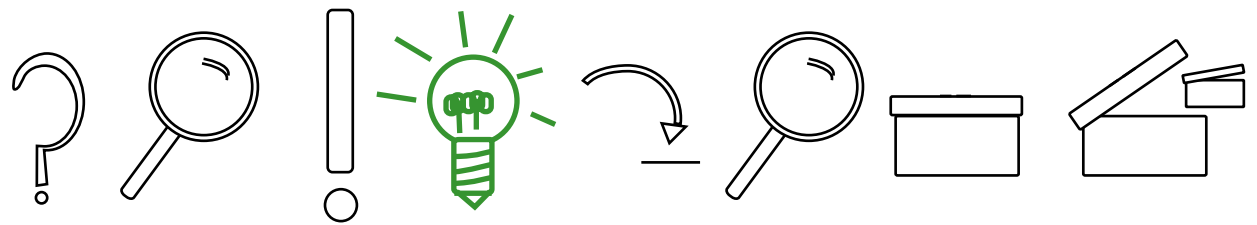


One part of the culture that is always heard of when mentioning fa'asamoa is the word fa'aaloalo which means respect. Fa'aaloalo is huge in the Samoan way of life because the culture is built upon it. Most Samoans teach respect because it keeps their children disciplined and polite. Samoans uphold a high standard of honor in the family and fa'aaloalao is an important part of keeping this honor. Fa'aaloalo brings order through respect. Families are organized this way, and the society carries on this order. The village, in essence, is an extension of the family. Just as each child knows his/her own responsibilities in the family; each family in the village knows its position in the village hierarchy. Each family accepts the dictates of the chief just as each child in the family accepts the dictates of the parents. There is a hierarchy or ranking of chiefs by age and authority just as there is a ranking of children in the family.

The school is following the rules of society which sets a bar between the students and teachers, the student's place will therefore always be below the teacher in the classroom and the respect reflects that.

I believe the children's situation can be changed without interfering with the culture & traditions by applying changes outside the classroom but still within the school environment like school ground or sports ground.

Idea



A few different aspects contributed to the idea of using a playground to enhance children's place in the school environment.

Social sustainability:

Assimilate knowledge

Skills

Development

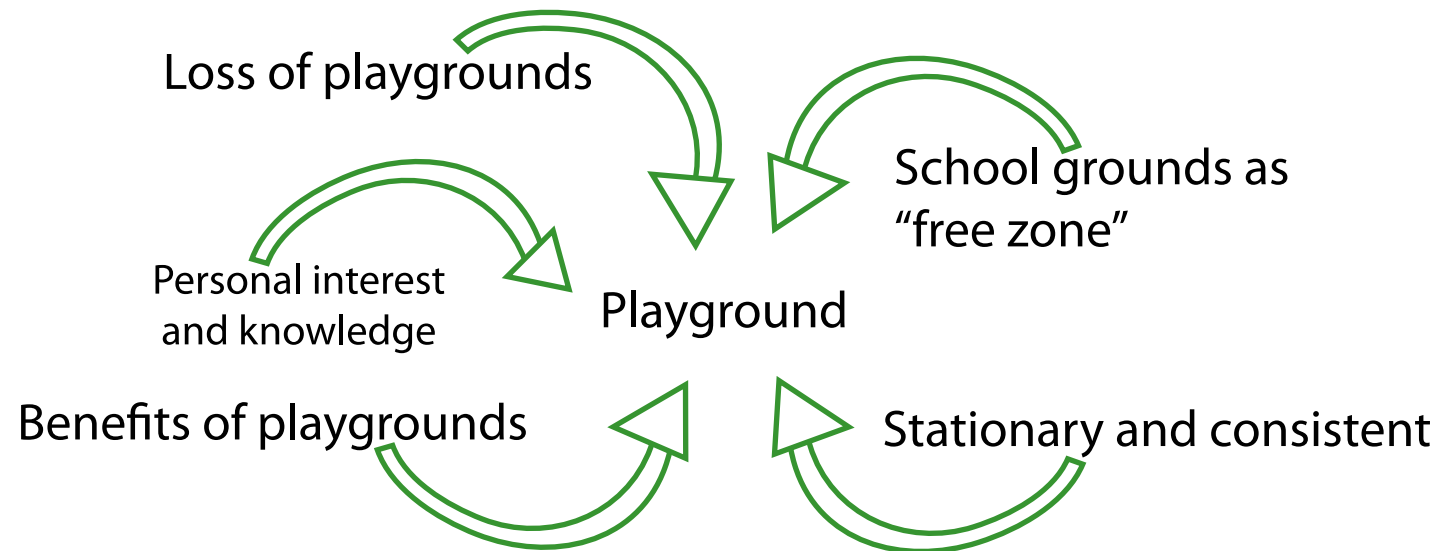
Health objectives

Participation

Equality

Accessibility

Quality of life.



Application



I wanted to bring what I learned about the classroom and work with a few of those issues in the playground.

Being seen as inferior  Being seen as important individuals

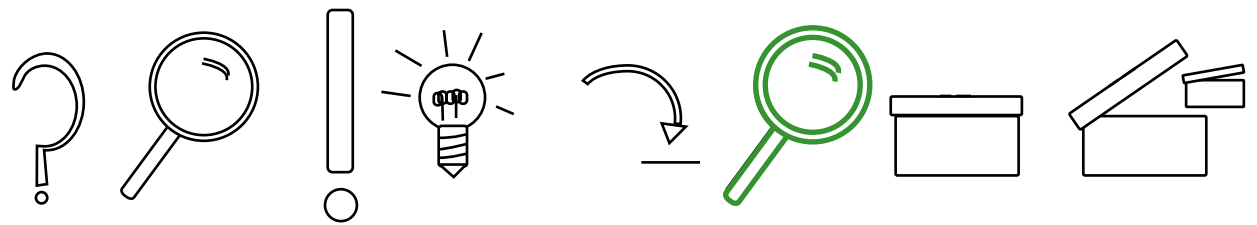
School for teachers  School environment for children

Limited self expression and art classes  Pretend play

Repetative learning and memorizing  Real life situations - Problem solving

Group sports  Diverse interests and challenges

Design Research

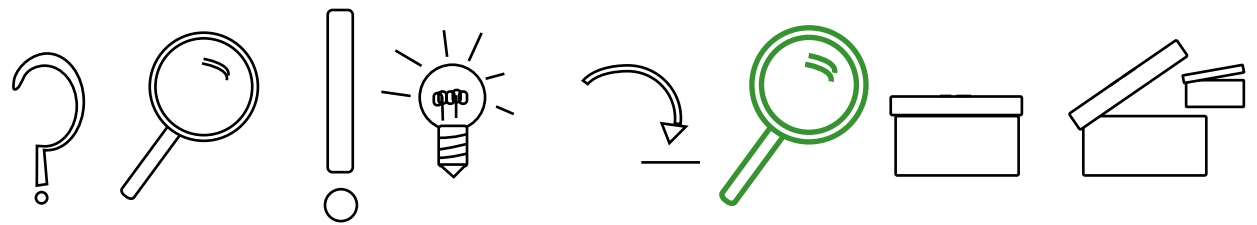


The specific design research was done by being an active member of the community, observing issues and opportunities. Researching playgrounds in places with similar climate and flora raised questions like:

- How can I make a shelter from the sun?
- What kinds of trees give the best shade?
- What would it be like to use fruit trees?
- Will it be used when it's raining?
- What is the site like in the rain?
- Where could water gather? (Important for mosquito control, rust and mold)



Design Research

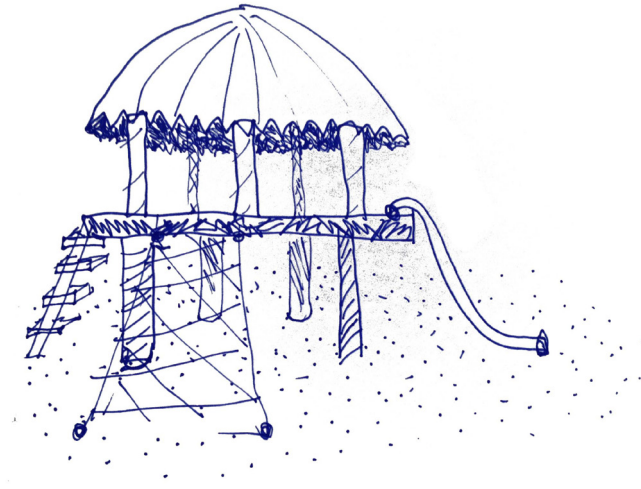


Environmental issues

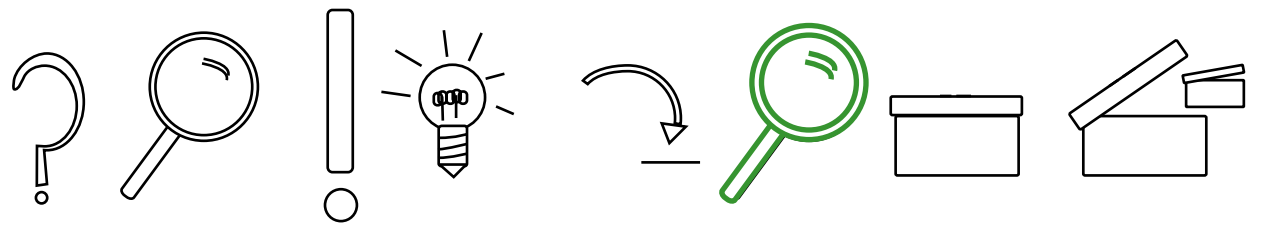
Adaptable templates

The Samoan Fale

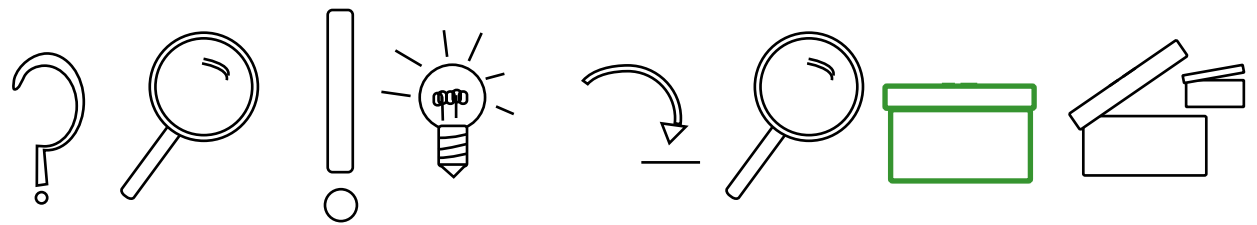
- The fale is the archetypical house of samoa.
- It is generally built using local material and local knowledge
- It is a common hang out spot
- A place where people gather to eat
- A resting place
- A perfect shade from the sun and allows the breeze to pass through
- A tall structure would invite an over/under play
- It could be built to give a double shade
- Building a play fale could tie many activities in a center point.



Design Research



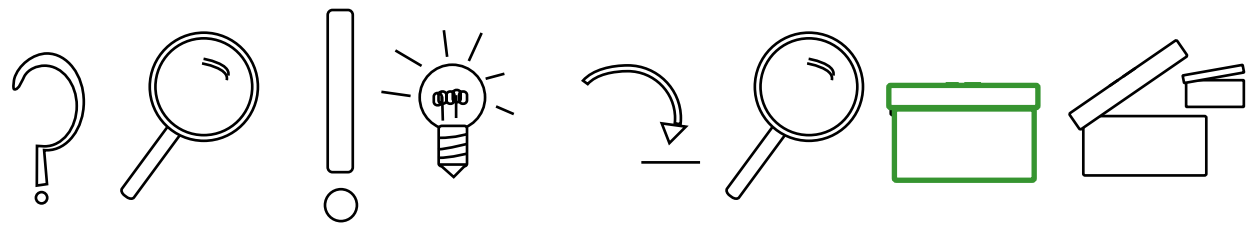
Result



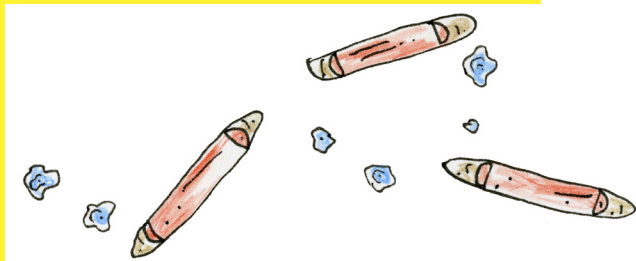
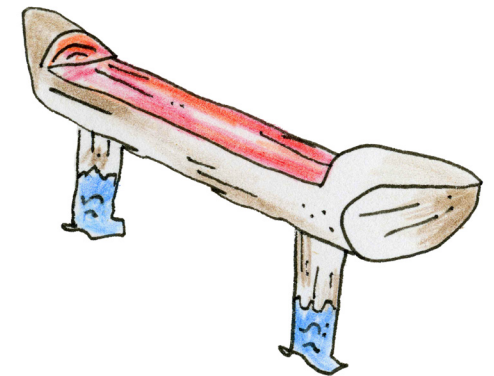
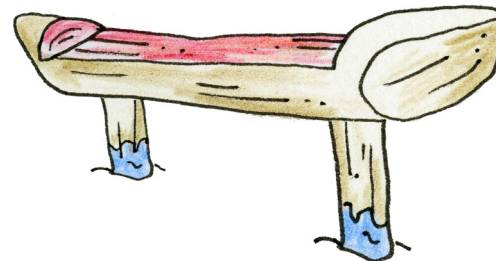
The playground was developed as two different zones. A land zone and ocean zone. It was built in Matautu Lefaga as a full size sketch and has developed since then.



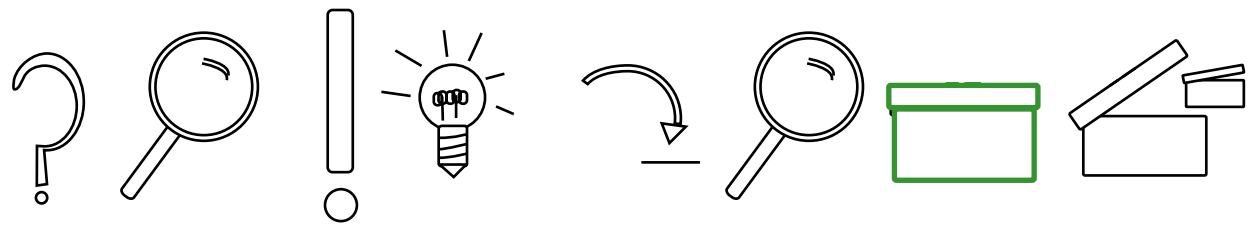
The Ocean



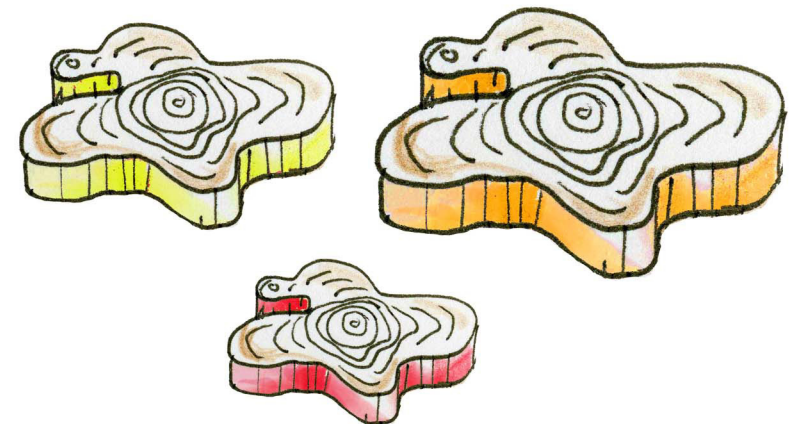
The Ocean Zone is made up of **boats and islands**. The boats are intended to work both as play boats for pretend play and as obstacle course. Around and between the boats, are little islands made from short tree trunks.



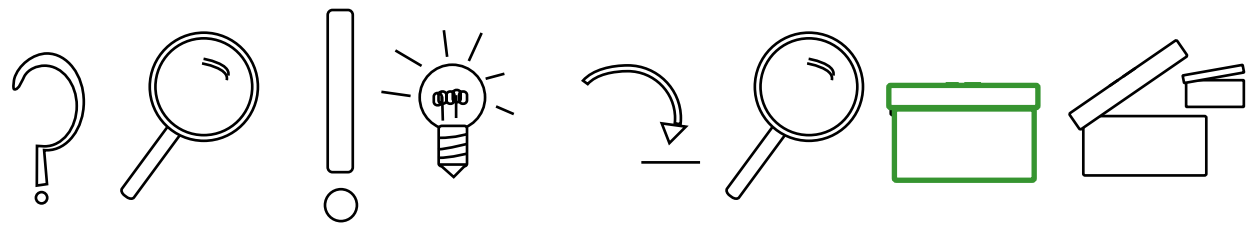
The Ocean



In the Ocean Zone are also **floating islands**. Those are loose pallets that the children can move around the playground to make new pathways and can be used in pretend play. All parts of the ocean zone can be enjoyed both in a group and independently and develop physical abilities as well as social interactions.



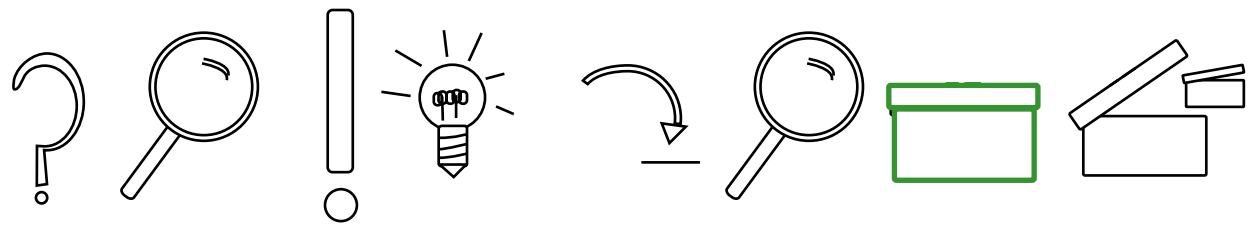
The Land



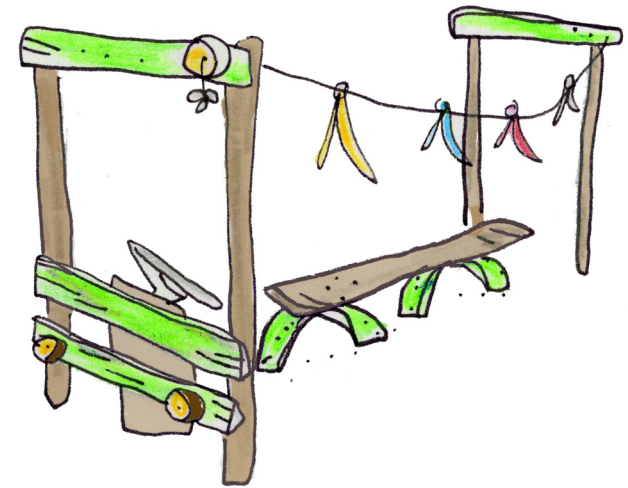
The Land Zone consists of the snake, the bus and the tall fale. **The snake** is another obstacle course and is first and foremost thought of as a physical play space to be used alone or in a group and focusing on the motor skills of children.



The Bus

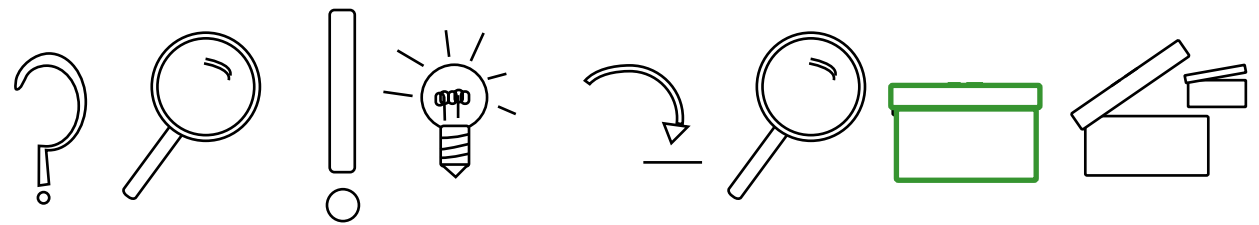


The bus is mostly thought of as a pretend play area. It is a place where many children can play together and interact both with each other and with children in other parts of the playground.

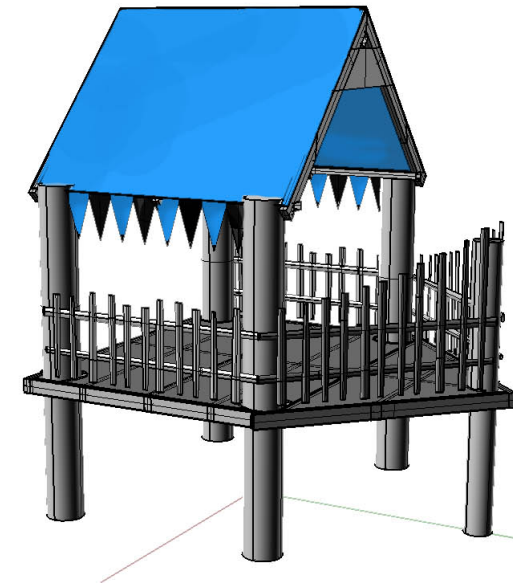


The Fale

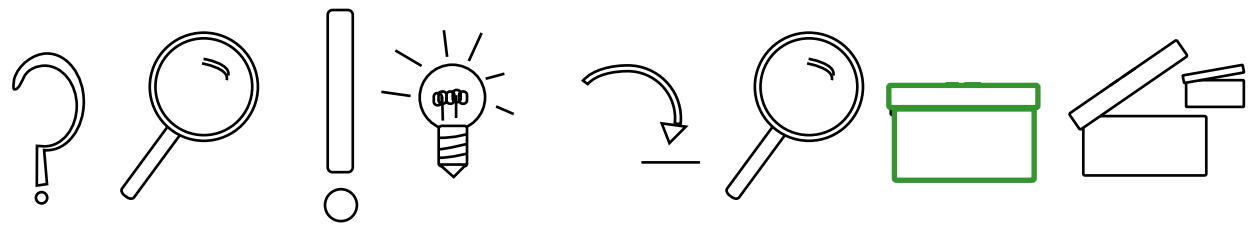
The fale is intended as an open ended gathering place. Having them on a raised platform creates a double shade from the sun and an increased play space. Furthermore it creates an over-under play and a different way of interaction.



The Ocean fale is inspired by pirate ships with a blue tarpaulin roof and black and blue triangular flags. The form of a forecastle shapes the triangular balcony and links it to the A-frame roof. The bottom part of the five poles is painted blue as if it was sailing in the ocean.



The Fale



The pulleys a fun delivery system and a way to explore the natural and material world by working with different weights. Two systems were installed, one with one wheel and the other with three so the children can explore the different forces needed to pull up same weight.

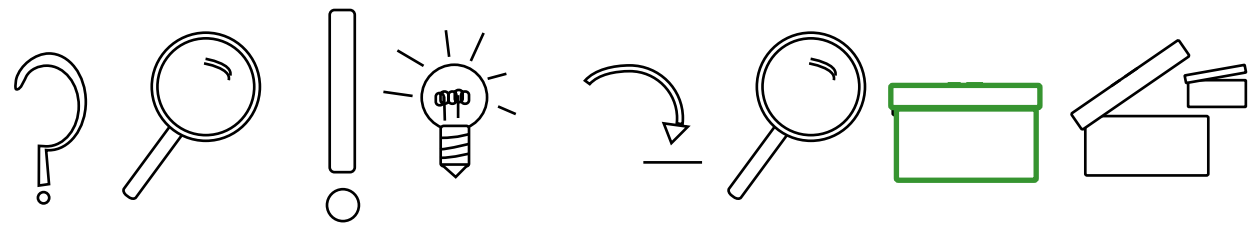
The Land fale is more focused on active play and interaction. A bridge connects the two towers but an additional way to get up and down is by a rope and/or a ladder on one side of the balcony.

Two holes were made in the floor of the fale and a pulley system was put up which is a great way for interaction.



The Fale

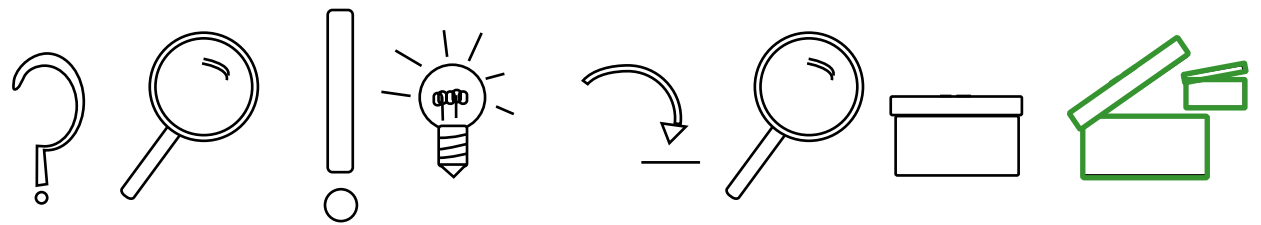
A child-sized playful environment, made and encouraged by adults, can show children that their play is valued as a meaningful thing and at the same time feel respected.



Under the Land fale is a space with a small desk that can be used as a storefront. The desks have about 10cm holes in them to place coconuts that can be used to store different small things for the store.



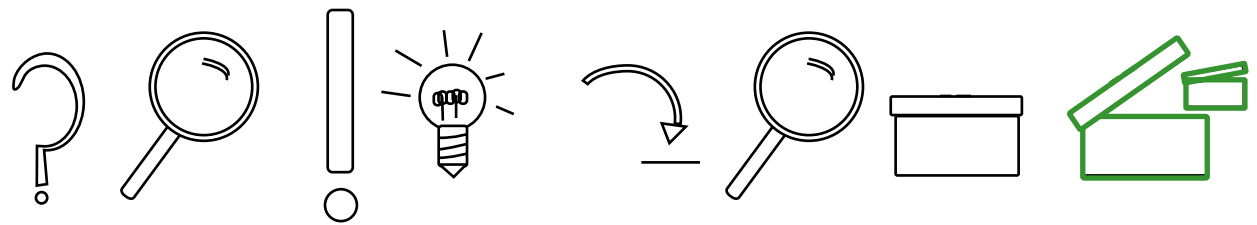
Next Steps



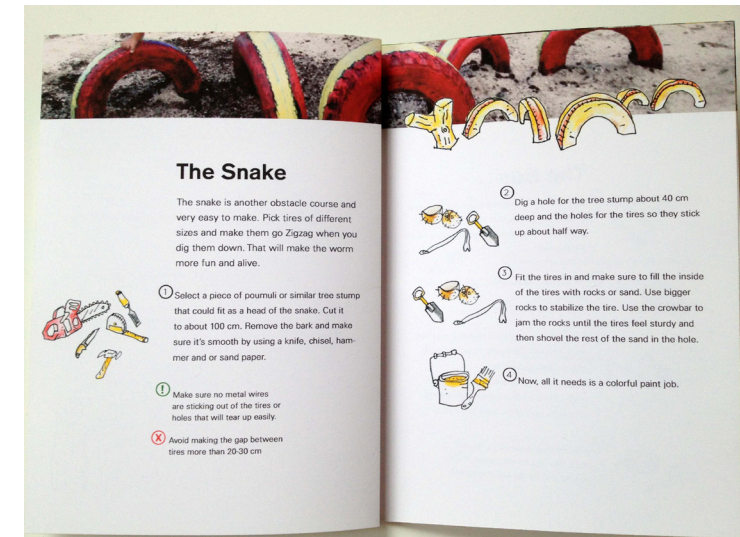
After designing a playground and building the sketch I realized that the design in itself would not impliment any changes. An inspirational DIY booklet, sent to all primary schools in the area, could on the other hand do exactly that.



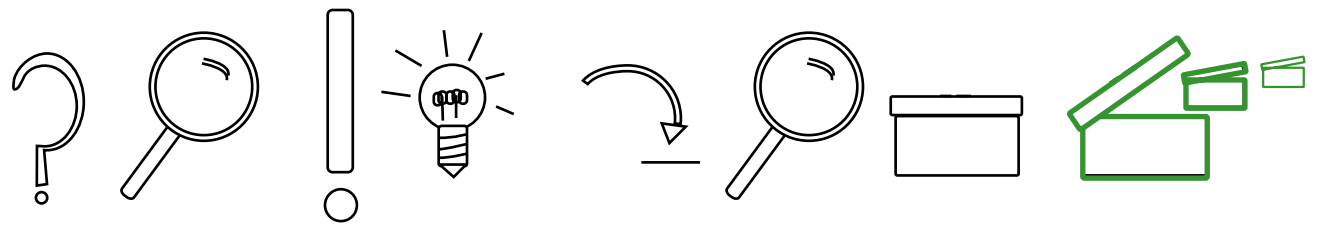
The Booklet



The booklet has an introduction about the benefits of building a playground at primary schools. It also includes chapters on material, tools, color choices and layout. It then has a step-by-step instructions on how to build each play-station.



The Afterlife



Although the master project has finished, the project has an afterlife. I have established contact with a graphic designer and MESC (Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture) to develop and finish the design of the booklet. It will then be printed and distributed to all primary schools in Samoa later this year.

