



Understanding the science behind play spaces

A unique consortium spearheaded by Urban&Civic are partnering with Coventry University to study the design of outdoor play environments and how future design can improve the physical literacy of children in a community setting.

The PhD project, entitled PLACES, is the culmination of the months of work by U&C, Bradley Murphy Design landscape architects and leisure company Jupiter Play to create a unique consortium with a shared interest in driving the highest standards of design for play spaces in our communities.

The research project will be focussed on U&C's strategic site at Houlton where BMD and Jupiter have been working with U&C over several years to co-create some of the area's early green spaces and play parks. Through a 'living lab' concept at Houlton, PhD student Amy Stringer will study live play spaces in the context of their communities working with children and families from Houlton's first primary school, St Gabriel's Academy. Specifically focussed on fundamental movement skills of children in early years, the aim of the research is to identify how the design of formal and informal play space can contribute to the development of physical literacy and improve the health and wellbeing outcomes of young people.

Physical Literacy and Fundamental Movement Skills are key areas in which children (and adults) are measured in how well they can perform certain key activities, such as running, throwing, catching and hopping.

The science suggests that if children perform all these well, either with high confidence or high competence and at an early age, the more likely they are to lead healthy active lives, known to be crucial for health and wellbeing.

Johanne Thomas, Regional Director for Communities and Partnerships for Urban&Civic and leading the research project on behalf of the business said; "We know through our relationships with local authorities in our places, just how important the quality of open spaces and play are in the creation of largescale sustainable communities. The formal and informal green spaces we create are as important as the new homes we deliver and the findings of our research will shape the way we design future play spaces right across our portfolio as well as influencing the wider built environment sector."

