

PROJECT REPORT

School oval re-design: Improving gender equity

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF TRADITIONAL OWNERS

The facilitators would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which the school and project was conducted, the Boon Wurrung and Woiwurrung (Wurundjeri) people of the Kulin Nation and pays respect to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This project involved a partnership with Brunswick North West Primary School using co-design with the students to redevelop the school oval to improve equitable use by all students. The project idea started after the school noticed a lack of female students using the oval and male students informing female students who did venture onto the oval that they were using the space “wrong”.

This project involved two aspects, the first was engaging the children in the development of their oval space, a space used predominately by these children, to allow them a greater sense of ownership of the oval. As we know that greater ownership of the space will lead to more equitable use. A relationship with the JRC (Junior Representative Council) allowed for intimate workshops around the oval design, while also allowing the JRC’s to take on leadership roles on this project for the wider school community.

Additionally, two workshops were facilitated for the school around increasing respectful relationships, exposure to women in leadership positions and women in sport. Deanne Carson from Body Safety Australia facilitated one workshop for parents around gender equity, to help the community understand why this project was being put in place and the importance of it. The second workshop was facilitated by Elise O’Dea, the co-captain of the Melbourne Demons AFLW team. O’Dea discussed with the year 3/4 cohort issues women face in sport, the lack of opportunities faced by women in the past as well as the improved opportunities currently expanding the world of AFL.

The completion of the project produced increased community knowledge surrounding gender equity as well as increased community engagement towards gender equity change. The project additionally created a list of recommendations for physical changes for the oval to improve equal gendered use of the space. These include improving the sporting aspect of the oval and oval maintenance, creating quiet sitting spaces on the oval for the girls and incorporating more nature elements for the students to produce more cubbies.

This report is intended to be used by Brunswick North West Primary School to obtain the required funding to implement the recommended changes to the oval space. This report can also be used as a guide for other schools and future projects looking to incorporate co-design with children around school play spaces, as well as workshops around improving gender equity at a primary school level.

2. PROJECT BACKGROUND & RESEARCH

Some girls at Brunswick North West Primary School play football, but most stay on the sidelines. The school has tried to implement initiatives to ensure equitable use of the oval, including having a 'girls' days,' for example, but these efforts have led to the boys "policing" how the girls use the space, including telling them they don't use the oval 'correctly.' Engaging children in the development of a space such as the oval, which is used predominately by children, will allow them a greater sense of ownership of their physical environment. Greater ownership of the space will then lead to more equitable use. Developing a leadership program and leadership roles for girls and non-binary children in the design and re-development of the space will lead to more fluid spaces and be a greater grassroots ownership of the space.

The Ideally grant is a grant and mentoring program created by the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) in partnership with the Office for Women (Program). The Program was open to young people in Victoria aged between 15-24 (Young Victorians), who had an idea to address gender inequality and gender-based violence in their community. The issues facing Brunswick North West Primary School seemed like the perfect opportunity to align with the ideally grants program. Lauren French, a senior educator with Body Safety Australia, received the grant to work with the school to improve the gender equitable use of the oval space.

During the preparation phase of the project, in-depth research was undertaken around gender equity within school environments (Agarwal & Shukla, 2017; Li, Hei, & Wong, 2016; McCullough, 2017), as well as research into co-design with children (Flowers, Timperio, Hesketh, & Veitch, 2019; Reimers, Schoeppe, Demetriou, & Knapp, 2018). Social norms dictate how people in our society develop their attitudes around topics such as gender equality and gender-based violence. The research found showed a disturbing link between sport and gender-based violence (Boutilier, Jadidzadeh, Esina, Wells, & Kneebone, 2017; Brimicombe & Cafe, 2012; Sønderlund et al., 2014). The big picture goal of the project is to replace the hyper-masculine sports culture that facilitates this kind of abuse with one that is empowering, diverse and respectful. It is the projects belief that by starting small and local, we can build a cohort of girls and gender diverse leaders to affect this change in society on a larger scale.

3. THEORY OF CHANGE

Problem: Lack of equal gendered use of the oval space

Inputs

- Grant funding
- Project facilitators time
- School support



Activities

- Respectful relationship workshops for families
- Female leaders in sport workshop
- JRC taking workshops to whole school setting



Outcomes

- Respectful relationship workshops for families
- Female leaders in sport workshop
- JRC taking workshops to whole school setting

4. PROJECT INTENTIONS

Below are the intentions initially set at the beginning of the project:

1. Facilitate three workshops with the school community

2. To create a new design for the oval

3. To model women in leadership positions

4. To improve the gendered use of the oval space



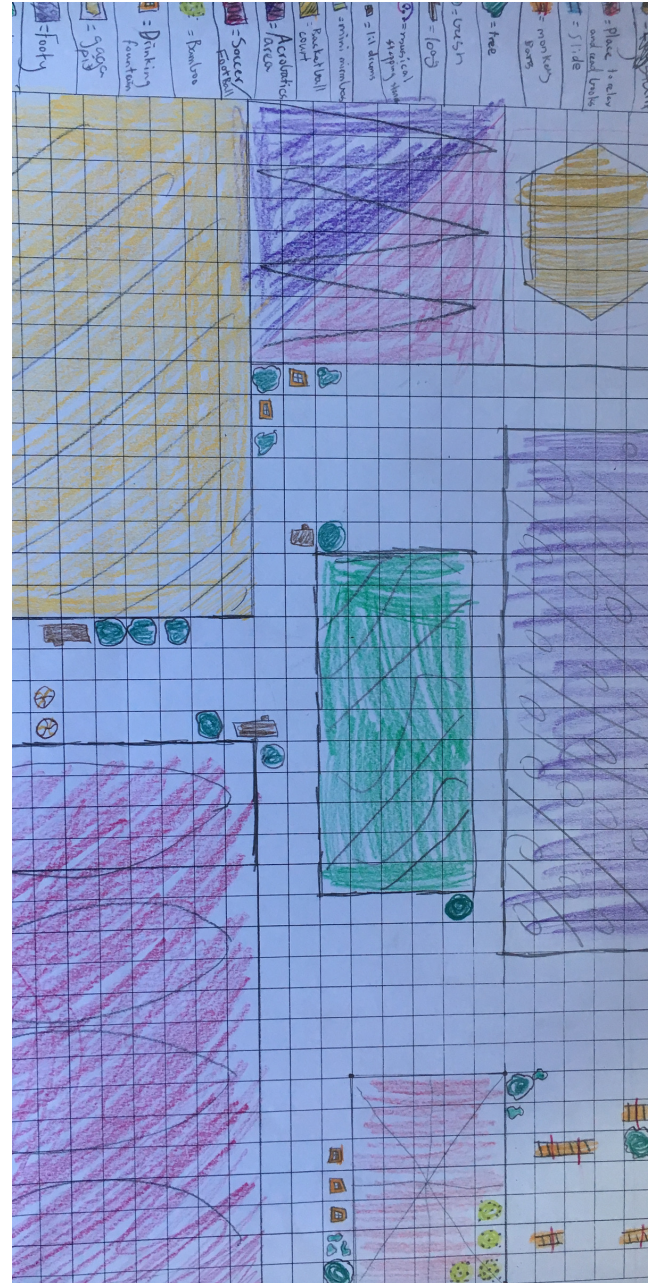
Draft oval design

5. PROJECT STRUCTURE

The project involved five stages of workshops and data collection utilising both students and the wider school community.

5.1. INITIAL PHASE

After initial meetings with the school, data was presented from a previous project around creating safe spaces in the school. The data included both students survey responses to questions regarding their school environment, as well as drawings depicting the student's ideal playground spaces. This data was used as a base starting point for the creation of the workshop materials.



5.2. FIRST JSC WORKSHOP

The first workshop with the JSC (junior school council) was facilitated at the end of April 2019. This workshop was designed to introduce the oval project to the students, introduce the facilitator, explain the JSC's role within the project and collect more data. The main take away from the workshop we wanted the students to understand was the difference between gender equality and gender equity.

GENDER EQUALITY:

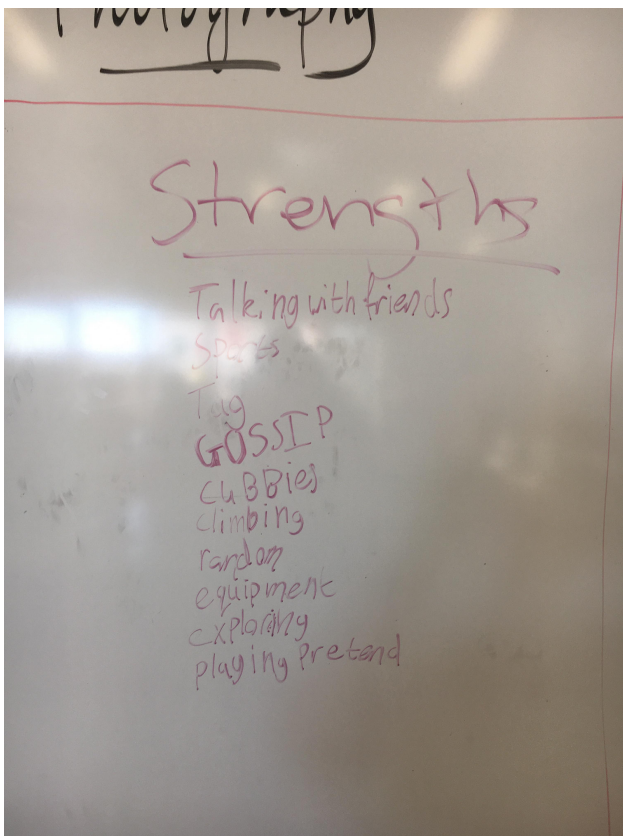


GENDER EQUITY:



There was a mixture of all year levels from prep through to grade 6 within the JSC. Students at all year levels showed clear understanding of these concepts. The older students helped explain the idea to the younger members, which helped cement the idea within the group.

After a warm up energiser to get the students focused, the first activity commenced. This activity was designed to get the students initially to think of the elements of their school yard they valued. While the project is looking at what changes can be made to the school oval, it was important to start from a place of positivity towards the space. The students were asked to make a list of all the strengths of their current school and play environment.



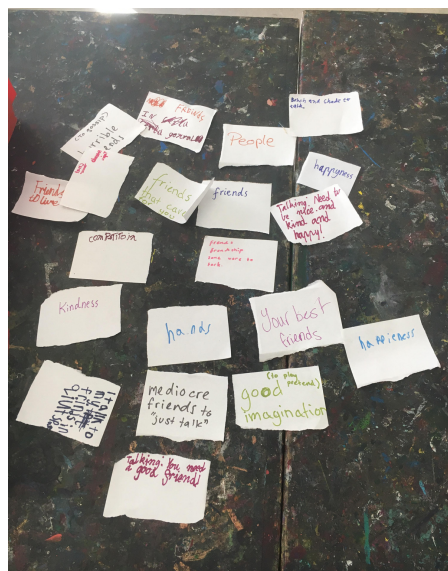
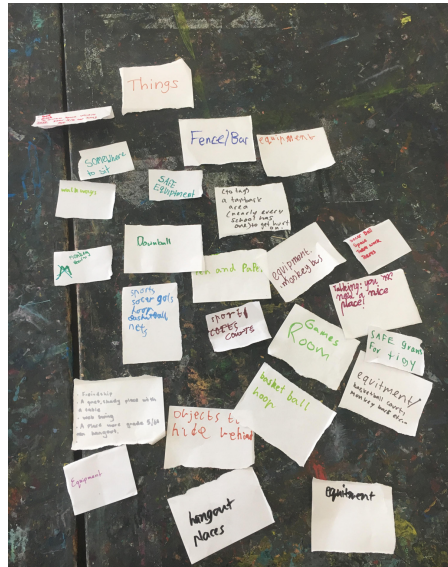
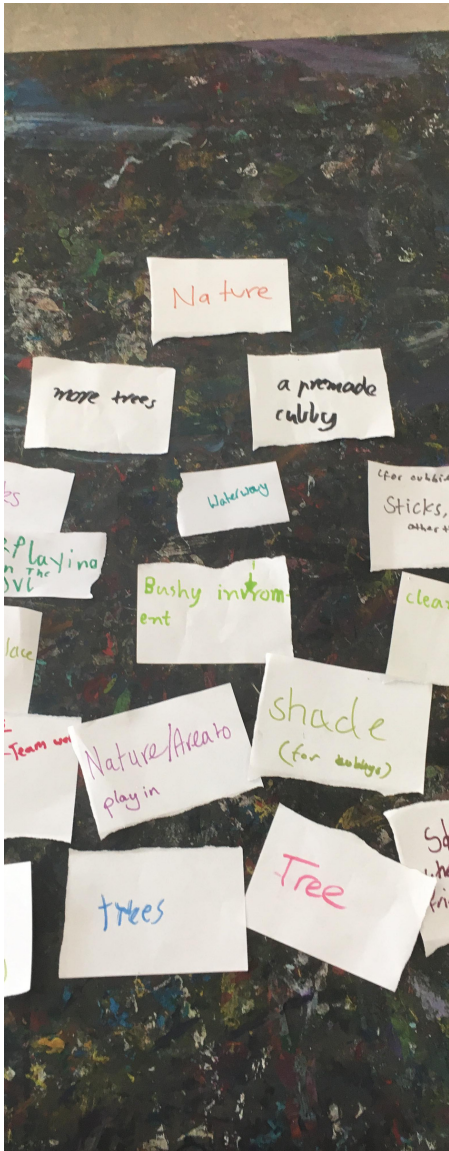
STRENGTHS:

- Talking with friends
- Sports
- Tag
- Gossiping
- Cubbies (playing/building)
- Climbing
- Random chats
- Playing on equipment
- Exploring
- Playing pretend

This activity showed not only the objects they enjoyed using, but how their environment allowed them to play in a way they enjoyed. They valued the space for sports and games as well as climbing equipment, but also the spaces to be social with friends.

OVAL PROJECT

The students were then asked to think about how they play, what games, which spaces they use at school. The students were encouraged to close their eyes and participate in a silent minute of thinking. With these images fresh within the students minds, they were asked what ingredients do they need to play. A paper activity was used, allowing students to write each individual ingredient that they needed to play. These could include people, nature or general things.



This activity showed again what the children valued, but also what they nominated as essential aspects of their play spaces. Some of the ingredients the school currently has, while others were areas or items the children wished for. Something that was noted was an area that "JUST year 5/6 can hang out". This idea is a running theme throughout the data collected.

FIELD REPORTS

Lastly, the students were shown field reports and their role in the further data collection of the project.

During the JSC election process, the oval project was explained as something they would have a large role to play in. The field reports were designed so the JSC had a role of responsibility within the project, the role of data collectors. While we had the capacity to do workshops with the JSC, it was not possible to do such in-depth workshops with every student at the school. However, we still wanted to gather data from as many students as possible.

The field reports were given to each member of the JSC, with a specific grade level to focus on. The instructions were to both observe how the students within that grade level played during recess and lunch, as well as asking students within that grade level what they do and do not like about their current oval. The students had until the next JSC meeting, which was around one month away, to collect as much data as they could. This allowed the JSC to feel like they had real ownership over the project as well as increasing their vested interest in gender equity.

The field reports can be found at appendix A.

5.3. AFLW WORKSHOPS

Elise O'Dea, Co-captain, Melbourne Demons

It was extremely important to the project that a workshop was held by a female sporting player for the students. As the project revolves around the oval space, a space mainly associated with sports, we wanted to include the links between gender equity and the sporting world. As the school is located within Melbourne, a passionate area for AFL (Australian Football League), a member of the AFLW was the ideal choice. Elise O'Dea, co-captain for the Melbourne Demons came to the school in early May to facilitate a workshop with the grade 3/4 cohort. After explaining the oval project to O'Dea, the connections to gender equity and the student's involvement in the project, the workshop involved mainly conversation with the students.



After a quick introduction to herself and her sporting career, O'Dea allowed the students to ask questions straight away. The conversations revolved around the lack of female opportunities in sports in the past, the changes that have happened and are still evolving within the AFLW as well as discussions around female perseverance in the light of ridicule and discrimination. The questions asked from the grade 3/4 students showed a level of maturity and understanding around these big issues. The girls within the grade asked most questions during the workshop, while the boys wanted to go for a kick on the oval with O'Dea. Feedback from the students post the workshop was completely positive, many had signed pieces of paper from O'Dea which ended up in frames at home.

This workshop allowed the girls to see female representation within a predominately male sport, while also highlighting the struggles present for women in sport for the boys.

STUDENT QUESTIONS

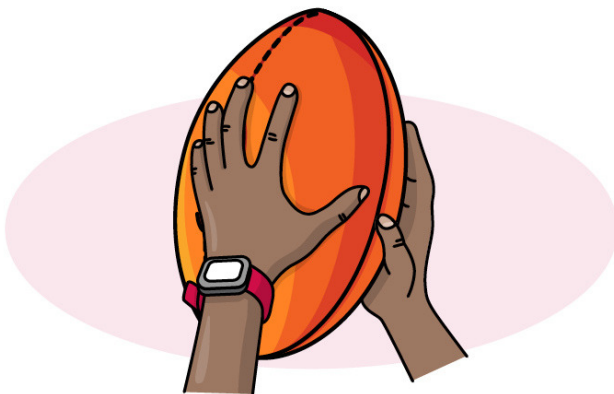
Questions asked from the grade 3/4 girls

“Did boys ever tell you, you couldn’t play?”

“Was it ever hard to keep playing when everyone told you not to?”

“Does playing footy ever get frustrating?”

“why do more people watch the men’s than the women’s AFL?”



5.4. FAMILY WORKSHOPS

Deanne Carson, CEO & Co-Founder Body Safety Australia

Deanne Carson, was organised to lead the workshop with parents and careers around gender equity. Body Safety Australia is an organisation centred around consent education and prevention education towards childhood sexual abuse, Deanne has worked extensively around promoting childhoods free from violence and childhoods including equitable and respectful relationships. Deanne had also previously worked with the school's parents and careers, so the information would be delivered by a familiar face. This was to allow the parents and careers to be more comfortable when coming to hear about a topic that may cause many to be uncomfortable. While unfortunately the parent turnout was not as high or diverse as was hoped, with only one male parent/career staying for the presentation, the workshop still induced productive discussions.



The workshop was designed to get the school community to understand why gender equity was an issue needing action. Deanne first acknowledged the strides the community had already done as well as being aware that making whole community change takes time. The workshop was a space in which the parents could sit with the feelings of injustice around missing out due to lack of equity and acknowledge that improving equity could influence their own child's play space. While there was real acceptance of gender equity issues, it is important to note that many parents felt it was not an issue at the school but rather an issue in other schools. When preliminary data from their own children was presented showing the inequities, parents were able to understand more fully the depth of the issue.

While the workshop was successful in opening discussions and understanding towards the project goals, it was felt that not enough parents had attended to gather data from them specifically. Therefore, a survey was created with questions asked during the workshop for all the parents and careers of the school to complete.

5.5. FINAL JSC WORKSHOP

At the end of May, the final workshop with the JSC was conducted. This workshop focused on the data collected through the field reports and the students experience of collecting it. The students were taken through a reflection of the process of data collection. Overall the student consensus was that the process was a success.

1. What did you find out that was surprising?

The students found the difference in gendered answers, that most of the people that didn't like the oval were girls, surprising even with the previous discussions around gender inequity. And they didn't like it because of the flying balls. But even the people using the balls on the oval didn't like the oval or playing with the balls that much, due to the oval's poor conditions. Most did like the open spaces.

2. Was the process of talking with the students easy?

Some found it easy when students were very forthcoming with information and their opinions. Others found it difficult as they approached students during break and some were too busy playing to speak with them. Teachers saw the JSC agents being very confident in their asking and data collection.

3. What was challenging or difficult?

The preps were hard to understand at times which made it difficult, they also changed their answers frequently. It did eat up the JSC's time during their break. The year 2 students didn't seem to want to share openly with the JSC members. Also asking larger groups together was challenging as they tended to have pack mentality and went with the strongest/loudest voice rather than acknowledge differences of opinions.

6. PROJECT FINDINGS

The project had two groups data was collected from, the Brunswick North West primary school students and the students parents and careers. Two surveys were conducted, for parents and students respectively, as well as analysing the students drawings and field reports.

6.1. PARENT DATA

While we did receive more data through the parent survey than the workshop attendance alone, we still only received one male participant compared to the 21 female participants and the 2 non-identified parents. Through thematically analysing the data, four main themes came out that the parents wanted for their children's play space.

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- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Quiet areas | 3. More play equipment |
| 2. Better upkeep of oval | 4. More nature elements |
-

The parents and carer data showed a definite interest in improving the oval from a sporting perspective, yet they also indicated the need for open spaces within nature that were designated for activities other than sports. It is worth noting that some parents also indicated the need to have a separate space for the year 5/6 cohort, while one parent wanted separate spaces for different genders.

PARENT FEEDBACK

Below are some quotes from the survey parents completed with their feedback on improvements to the school play spaces.

"Drainage! Flat, safe open space - an oval!"

"Some differentiation of the play areas, there needs to be a recognition that it doesn't hurt for younger grades to understand that some areas are somewhere they get to play as they get older"

"Need a friendship tree/seating when feeling lonely and have no one to play with"

"Trees! Bushes, plants, logs, rocks and boulders. Edible plants and fruit trees"

"More females joining in soccer/ downball/ basketball/ footy"

"I would like our school yard to have scribble wall. All children can be engaged with drawing activities"

"places for kids to hide away and feel safe."

"Older boys need somewhere to play the rougher games that are part of their development, older girls need places they can sit around and talk in the way that many seem to want to do by the later years of primary school."

6.2. KIDS DATA:

6.2.1. SURVEY

Gendered usage of space



**66% Male only
spaces**

The survey, which was conducted before the project commenced, had three main findings. The first being that the boy's interest in sporting activity was apparent from as early as year 1. The second finding was that the girls preferred interest in quiet sitting areas was also present from as early as year 1. This shows a clear difference in the play styles of the girls compared to the boys at the school, different styles not being shown an equal amount of space.

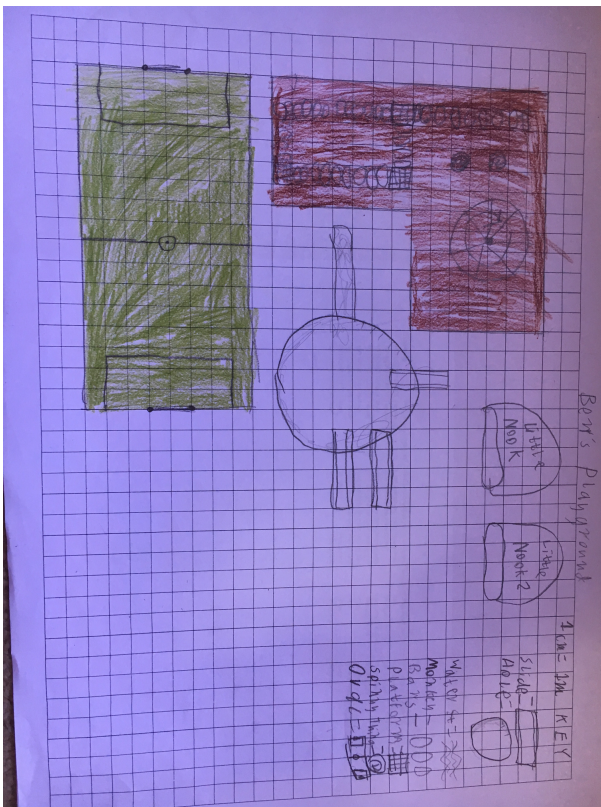
As the third finding was that compared to the girls play spaces, the boys took up the majority of yard and oval space. Within the school, exclusive boy play areas took up to 66% of the total space available. All gendered play took up to 30% of the play space, leaving generally less than 5% of the space being used solely by girls.

KIDS DATA:

6.2.2. DRAWINGS

Kids ideal play space

From reviewing the drawings by the students of their ideal oval space, four elements became apparent.



1. Both genders wanted more nature elements
2. Girls drew more quiet spaces and water elements
3. Equal number of cubbies drawn by both genders
4. Sports was one of the least drawn elements equally by both boys and girls



KIDS DATA:

6.2.3. FIELD REPORTS

Students observational & interview data

The field report data found differences between the grades as well as differences in reasoning behind using or not using the oval space. As noted by the JSC, most students that did not like nor use the oval space were girls. The girls interviewed did not like the oval due to the danger associated with getting hit in the head by balls, the fact that the oval is not in good condition to play on and that it is perceived as a boy's only space. One girl stated "people (boys) don't let you play on the oval".

What was interesting about the data was that as the age of the students increased, the negative views towards the oval also increased.

From preps through to grade 2, there was an even amount of positive and negative comments relating to the oval. However, from grade 3 to grade 6, most comments about the oval were negative. The elements liked overall about the oval were the openness of the space and the ability to play sports and games.

7. THE NEXT STEP

Below are the recommendations found through the project for the school and wider community to action.

1. **Funding to implement physical changes to the oval space.** Changes including improved oval base, better drainage for wet weather and upkeep of sporting section. The sporting section also needs to be able to act as an area for footy, soccer and general ball sport play. This may involve goal nets that can be interchangeable between soccer goals and footy goal posts.
2. **A designated sitting area on the oval space for non-sporting use,** to encourage the girls to venture onto the oval space for their relaxing and conversations. By beginning to increase the girl's presence on the oval, this will enable them to feel more ownership towards the space. Some girls may use then feel more comfortable joining in on the sporting area, while others will continue to enjoy the area as a less active space.
1. **The oval space additionally needs more nature elements,** such as materials to build cubbies, trees and areas to hide in and around. A water element would be ideal to incorporate; however, it may not be feasible at a school level.
2. **Continued information and engagement sessions for the community,** to continue the whole community change towards gender equity. This may involve regular workshops with the community and incorporation of gender equity information in newsletters. Potential the creation of a parent lead forum around gender equity issues.

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9. APPENDIX A: FIELD REPORT

1. Where do the (grade level) girls play at break time?
2. How do the (grade level) girls play at break time?
3. Where do the (grade level) boys play at break time?
4. How do the (grade level) boys play at break time?
5. Ask a few (grade level) if they like the oval, why/why not?

10. APPENDIX B: PARENT SURVEY

1. What did you value as a child?
2. What would you have enjoyed doing/playing, if you had the opportunity?
3. What do you value for your child's experiences in the playground?
4. What do you want for your child, that they don't already have/engage with?
5. What would you like to see/see more of in the BNW yard?
6. Do you identify as female/male/prefer not to specify?