

FROM THE EDITOR

The KPI Newsletter is a new forum for discussing trends and issues shaping the future of play and playgrounds. In this first issue we will focus on the importance of rethinking ways to design activity environments for kids. Recently the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation launched its Health Games Research program of \$2 million to study interactive health games in 2009. The goal is to understand how games and game technologies can improve people's health: how to motivate game players to become more physically active.

Along the same lines, KOMPAN has developed its new electronic playground designs, named ICON. In this issue you can read about the first KOMPAN electronic playground in North America, and you will find an article describing the inspirational context of modern media shaping children's play culture today.

The newsletter will be published bimonthly.

Cheers,

Helle Burlingame

Director, KOMPAN Play Institute, NA

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TRANSFORMING PLAY VALUE IN PLAYGROUNDS



Spicing up the attraction of play value elements in playgrounds to engage today's youth is a fascinating challenge. Kid's play culture has changed because the world we live in has changed. I will discuss a recent book by Don Tapscott, "Grown Up Digital: How the Net Generation is Changing your World," in order to understand children's attraction to electronics, and to extract new insight for design of playgrounds.

NEW ORLEANS "STATE OF THE ART" PLAYGROUND



An example of a new playground merging the demands of an environmentally sustainable playground with state-of-the-art electronic games that stimulate the digital generation of children to play.

The future is here. It's just not evenly distributed.

– William Gibson

The KOMPAN Play Institute is a network of international specialists in active outdoor environments for children and young people. We keep an eye on trends in society and look at how they affect children and teenagers and their playgrounds and outdoor spaces all over the world. We initiate research projects and collaborate with researchers internationally. Our goal is to share our knowledge for the benefit of children and young people as well as the adults who work in this field. We do this through seminars, conferences, articles and our website.

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UPDATES FROM THE KOMPAN PLAY INSTITUTE



TRANSFORMING PLAY VALUE IN PLAYGROUNDS

Don Tapscott brings a refreshing perspective on technology and the Net Generation. A perspective that can calm any freaked-out Baby Boomer parent, and also bring insight to the workplace, product development and the recreation field.

New technology like videogames, mobile devices, the Internet, and interactive social networking sites are transforming institutions — education, business, government, politics, health-care, families and even the recreation industry. The Millennials, also known as the Net Generation, are spearheading this movement of pervasive technology in our lives.

In most families, we find ourselves in generational tension about the issues revolving around the use of these intriguing new devices. Business managers also find themselves pulling their hair out to understand young people. One day they will help create innovative new products using their superior knowledge of communications and media technologies, and the next day they will refuse the boundaries of the cubicle,

insisting that work can be done while off on a ski trip since research, emailing, writing, phone calling and texting easily can be done any time during the day with new technological tools. What is a manager to do when a young employee does not see the necessity of the in-house company meeting, which can be done using Skype?

Don Tapscott, in his new book "Grown Up Digital: How the Net Generation Is Changing Your World", brings a refreshing perspective on technology and the Net Generation. It is a perspective that can calm any freaked-out Baby Boomer parent (like me) about what is going on in their family — not to mention bring insight to the work place, product development and the recreation field.

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Transforming Play Value, continued

GENERATION	YEAR	PERCENTAGE OF U.S. POPULATION*
Baby Boom	1946–1964	23
Generation X	1965–1976	15
Net Generation (Y)	1977–1997	27
Next (Z)	1998–Present	13

* U.S. Population: 301,621,157 (2008)

NET GENERATION BACKGROUND

The Net Geners currently range in age from 12 to 32. Mr. Tapscott describes the Net Generation as the biggest in history. He points out that more than 81 million people in the United States were born from 1977 to 1997, and that they make up 27 percent of the population. By comparison, the Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, were 77 million strong and are now 23 percent of the population.

FROM GENERATION GAP TO GENERATION LAP

The most defining trait of the Net Generation is their lifelong experience using the Internet and cell phones and playing video games — in contrast with their Baby Boomer parents, whose signature medium has been the TV. TV is a one-way broadcast medium that requires only passive participation. The Internet, cell phones and video games are collaborative media that invite participation from multiple users all over the world. Mr. Tapscott describes the risks of Internet use and the loss of privacy: setting yourself up for future disaster by posting too much revealing personal information, which you might regret down the line.¹ It is beyond the scope of this article to enter into this important discussion. I will concentrate on some of the more positive take-home lessons

I believe this book offers the recreation industry.

Today teenagers and tweens are the authorities on something really important in the world: the communications media. It is a technology that Boomers don't really understand. "Around the world the Net Generation is flooding into the workplace, marketplace, and every niche of society. They are bringing their demographic muscle, media smarts, purchasing power, new models of collaborating and parenting, entrepreneurship, and political power into the world."² It is the first time in history that the role of the child in the home is changing, according to John Seely Brown of The Annenberg Center at the University of South California. He puts it this way: "So for the first time there are things that parents want to be able to know about and do, where the kids are, in fact, the authority."³

Mr. Tapscott identifies eight norms of many members of the Net Generation: they prize freedom; they want to customize things; they enjoy collaboration; they scrutinize everything; they insist on integrity in institutions and corporations; they want to have fun even at school or work; they believe that speed in technology and all else is normal; and

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Teens buy a new gadget and just use it. They soak up technology as just another part of the environment. In 2007, 72 percent of 13- to 17-year-olds in the United States had mobile phones.

Transforming Play Value, continued



New gamers in discovery play. No instructions are required — they jump right in and start playing. Adults tend to want to read the manual first, and then start playing, which is the opposite way to problem-solve.

This is the first time in history that the role of the child in the home is changing. “For the first time there are things that parents want to be able to know about and do, where kids are, in fact, the authority.”

they regard constant innovation as a fact of life. They want rich experiences from work and play. I want to point out that when they do not find these things in their lives, whether in relation to school, community, work, playgrounds, or products, they will let their friends know about it through the Internet — and when their 200 friends on Facebook know, the world knows.

Mobile phones are another example of how differently today’s kids and parents view the world. Parents buy mobile phones for their kids because of safety. With a mobile phone, kids can call home in an emergency, while parents can call to check their whereabouts. Kids naturally see phones differently, as an indis-

pensable tool — like having their friends in their pocket wherever they are.

THE COMPETENT CHILD

I agree with Mr. Tapscott’s view of the child as an authority and active participant in the use of media. However, it is wrong to idealize kids and argue that they do not need any socialization. Children today still need parents to instill values and keep them out of trouble. These are the sometimes challenging times we live in as parents in the democratic family. The risks have now moved to the world that kids experience online — inside the family home, or on their

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Transforming Play Value, continued



Kids' attention span is not short for games.

Digital media are great tools for bringing us together. Parents can learn a lot from their kids by playing electronic games with them, as well as all the “old school” stuff like reading a book together or playing in the park.

mobile phones anywhere. They can potentially face bullies, sexual predators, online porn and other scary influences. However, I also agree with Mr. Tapscott that it makes no sense to censor the Internet, since these kids can always find ways to sneak around our pathetic digital fences. It becomes a challenging game. Let us instead discuss, argue and voice our opinion as parents in dialogue with our kids about human values and other important topics, to help them build resilience and perspective when navigating the world online, and expect to learn a lot as a parent in the process.

Parents still have to draw the line between right and wrong and between safe and unsafe, but we have to be willing to discuss the rules to build trust. Kids might pretend they are not

listening and tell you that you don't know anything, but they do listen! Even though they often famously respond like my own 13 year old: “I know!”

We cannot leave the upbringing of our children to the digital media. They need in-depth human relationships with parents and friends. Digital media, however, are great tools for bringing us together, for instance, in new mesmerizing interactive electronic games. Parents can learn a lot from their kids by playing electronic games with them, as well as all the “old-school” stuff like reading a book together or playing in the park.

**THE MINDSET TO COLLABORATE:
TRAINED BY GAMES**

When 92 percent of American children ages 2–17 have regular access to video games, entertainment is not just an expectation, it's big business — bigger than the Hollywood film industry.⁴ The Net Generation is the relationship generation. They still hang out when they play electronic games, often in groups, or playing online with friends from around the world. It was the architecture of the early games that limited the number of players, but that has all changed. The Net Generation is social — not individualistic like their Baby Boomer parents. According to historian Neil Howe, today's kids like to do things together. Some 81 percent of tweens (ages 8–12) and 53 percent of teens (13–18) say that the number one way they like spending time with their friends is in person.⁵

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Transforming Play Value, continued

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When you collaborate in playful problem solving and you all “stink” at the task at hand, you laugh and gain empathy for each other. Getting better develops a teamlike camaraderie similar to sports.



Gamers engage in creative play involving trial and error, learning by experimentation. Fear of failure doesn't exist when you are truly immersed in play.

DESIGNING ACTIVITY ENVIRONMENTS

So, what lessons can we extract from this book when designing activity environments for kids? The values that drive this young generation, as described in the introduction to this article, indicate that they are going to shake things up a bit. They want to have a say, and we should expect that to be the case more and more with regard to how communities plan spaces for people to socialize and stay fit. If we can make these spaces fun in new ways, we are doing everybody a favor.

The playground industry is launching new electronic playgrounds as ways to motivate kids (and their parents) to be active. New industrial electronic designs of modern playgrounds are now appearing in the environments. Whether they pass the test or not, we find out on YouTube or Facebook — as well as how we can improve these designs! If the verdict is thumbs up, we might experience a Renaissance in park use — not only as a space to spend time and enjoy nature, but also as a space that offers the Net Generation the prized opportunity to spend time together in person, having fun with intriguing electronic games outdoors.

— Helle Burlingame

1. Don Tapscott, *Grown Up Digital: How the Net Generation is Changing your World*, McGrawHill, 2009.
2. *Ibid*, page 3.
3. *Ibid*, page 28.
4. John C. Beck, and Mitchell Wade, *Got Game: How the Gamer Generation is Reshaping Business Forever*, Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2004,3.
5. *Ibid*, page 294.



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NEW ORLEANS “STATE OF THE ART” PLAYGROUND

After Hurricane Katrina slammed into New Orleans on August 29, 2005, much of the Lower Ninth Ward in New Orleans suffered catastrophic flooding and the vast majority of its residents lost their homes. Since the disaster, not a single playground has been built in the area, and the children of this part of New Orleans didn’t have a proper place to play.

The Make it Right Foundation, headed by the actor and activist Brad Pitt, partnering with PlayGreen Initiative, dedicated Kellogg Park on Wednesday, December 3, 2008, aided by donations from Kellogg’s Corporate Citizenship Fund, KOMPAN, Inc., and BNIM, a leading architectural firm.

The play space was constructed in an environmentally sustainable way, using local suppliers, native plantings, and natural means to control water flow, thereby reducing pollution, runoff, and

other problems associated with asphalt and more traditional playground design. The playground equipment is constructed using sustainable methods including the use of non-toxic, recyclable and environmentally friendly materials. Solar energy was used to power the electronic components on the new equipment.

The playground equipment, ICON, was donated by KOMPAN, Inc. ICON is a state of the art outdoor gaming platform that can be integrated into KOMPAN’s climbing, exercise and playground equipment. A number of different ICON games energize play on the equipment and stimulate motion, strategic thinking and physical activity. Children can keep score and play alone, in pairs or in teams as they climb, jump, run and swing their way through the equipment.

————— Tom Grover, President, KOMPAN NA