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The freedom to make a splash or crash

Water play and music are both recognised for their ability to provide sensory stimulation. Children of all ages and abilities benefit on physical, cognitive and emotional level from these responsive mediums. Yet these modes of play are rarely available for pupils to use on an on-demand basis, outside the confines of a structured session. This has now been resolved with the development of outside play equipment which can be erected for permanent use, encouraging free play and exploration.

The development of specialised modular tanks means water play equipment can now be made safely available at all times to children aged over three. Plug-In-and-Play tanks are modular in design, allowing them to be interconnected with gulleys or fitted with accessories ranging from funnels, to buckets to water wheels. These can even be arranged in a series, with tippers used to cascade water from one to another. Or the gully can be fitted with multiple boards and grooves to allow the flow to be dammed.

Manipulating and channelling the water, pupils can begin to develop an understanding of abstract concepts such as cause and effect. And Plug-In-and-Play is also designed to facilitate group activity, allowing the development of social skills as pupils communicate and cooperate with others during play.

Musical instruments are also now available for outside use. Playscapes consisting of percussion instruments ranging from drums to xylophones and glockenspiels, can be deployed individually or as part of an activity playground. SoundPlay equipment is imaginatively designed for interactive play, with animal drums available in the shape of a turtle or dragon, or elaborate pipe drums to create a symphony of sound, all of which have fixed beaters.

Available in standalone units, SoundPlay comprises giant instruments such as the Metallophone, an enormous xylophone featuring aluminium tone bars with PVC resonators. The Metallophone comes as a bass, tenor or soprano arrangement, providing pentatonic, diatonic and chromatic ranges, while the Marimba, a type of glockenspiel, uses wooden tone bars with PVC resonators to create a tenor sound with a pentatonic and diatonic range. Two African variations of these are also available: the Amadinda, a xylophone without resonators, and the Kalimba, a larger than life thumb piano.

SoundPlay acts as a creative outlet, heightening self-esteem and listening skills. But it also provides real learning, enabling pupils to develop an understanding of vibration, resonance, pitch and tone.

Both Plug-In-and-Play and SoundPlay equipment comply with DDA requirements (all of the components are accessible from a wheelchair) as well as meeting NCCA guidelines for special educational needs. These structures can be used to achieve concrete learning objectives, enabling pupils to increase their spatial awareness, hone their fine and gross motor skills, and increase their levels of concentration on an individual basis. But they are also an excellent means of encouraging pupils to interact with and take control of their environment through exploratory play. Suitable for any outdoor locality, this equipment opens the floodgates for children of all ages and abilities to the sensory stimuli of sound and water.

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