



Issue 5- August/
September | 2026

Open Minds Open Doors

A newsletter by Playeum and Dr Esther Joosa as editor about the power of open-ended play as a pathway to inclusion



IN THIS FIFTH ISSUE DR ESTHER JOOSA EXPLORES:

OMOD and the
President's Challenge
Page 2

Creating Play Spaces
that work
Page 3

Water Play
Page 4

Play Programme
Page 4

Open Minds Open Doors

Updates about the OMOD programme

Welcome to the fifth issue of the Open Minds Open Doors Newsletter. In this issue, we reflect on the support of the President's Challenge and the continuing development of OMOD.

Dr Esther explores the role of observation and how thoughtful changes to play environments can support children's participation. With increasing opportunities for play in community and public spaces, we hope that OMOD has helped participating children and families develop greater confidence to participate more widely in the community.

As Playeum pauses the programme to review and consider its next phase, we hope families will continue to engage in open-ended play in everyday and community spaces, discovering their own pathways through play.

Karen Chin
Pedagogue, Playeum

Open Minds Open Doors, Play and the President's Challenge

BY DR ESTHER JOOSA

Open Minds Open Doors (OMOD) has been running since 2019. It began as a collaborative research initiative involving Playeum and Arts of the Earth, with support from NCSS. The programme grew from a shared vision of play as a pathway towards a more inclusive world.

Through sustained work with children, families and educators, the OMOD approach has continued to develop. In 2025, the programme received support from the President's Challenge to extend its work and benefit more families raising children with diverse needs.

Over the past two years, OMOD has evolved around two regular play sessions each month, creating opportunities for children and families to return, reconnect and develop greater familiarity with the possibilities of open-ended play. Supported by community partners and repeated participation, the programme has also enabled families to share experiences, observe their children and build relationships with one another.

As we prepare for the upcoming year, there will be a short pause while Playeum reviews the programme and considers its next phase. Following this review, families will receive further information about future OMOD initiatives.

These initiatives may include opportunities for families to become more actively involved in shaping play environments, observing their children's play and exploring play practices that can be continued beyond the sessions and within everyday family and community life.

There is no single pathway through play. Each child explores, communicates and participates in their own way and at their own pace. As OMOD has developed, its work has increasingly focused not only on children's participation, but also on supporting families to recognise their children's strengths, understand their play and develop greater confidence in navigating the wider community.

As the content designer and co-creator of OMOD, I hope the next phase will continue to support families in noticing and understanding changes in their child's participation and development. Most importantly, I hope it will deepen our understanding of play as a foundation for wellbeing, autonomy, belonging and meaningful participation in an inclusive community.

For parents who want to learn more join us in our upcoming parent conversations, workshops and play sessions

Since the early beginnings of the OMOD play sessions, Dr Esther has been available to listen to, and learn from parents. During regular play and workshop sessions, she has shared insights, examples and ways of seeing play differently, not simply as an activity, but as a pathway towards participation, communication and belonging. As OMOD pauses for review, we hope families will continue observing and discovering new ways of understanding their child through play. Further information about future parent and play initiatives will be shared as plans develop.

Creating Play Spaces that Work: Observing and Responding to Children's Waterplay and the "One Change Rule."

By Dr Esther Joosa

One of my roles in OMOD is to curate the play practices, including the space. Sometimes changes are inspired by the context or by my observations of how children respond through play. As children navigate their own pathways, my aim is to help create an environment that offers different ways to enter, explore and participate. This is an ongoing process of observing, responding and making thoughtful adjustments.

Understanding the Context

Play sessions start well before the children arrive. I begin by considering the environment, relationships and family experiences and children's previous opportunities for exploration, engagement and problem-solving. During the past three months, water play has become part of Kids Space. It began unexpectedly when a leaking tap attracted the children's attention as they filled a basin. Although some children had previously encountered water play in a smaller area, this was the first time it had been introduced within the larger space.

Space and Boundaries

Space and boundaries are closely connected. Boundaries can sometimes restrict play, but a large, undefined space can also be confusing or overwhelming. Particularly when children repeatedly move through the water play area

The "One Change Rule"

Rather than changing several aspects of the environment at once, I often introduce one simple adjustment. In Kids Space it was an open structure placed over the water play basin.



"Observation is the foundation for responding to children. Sometimes one small change in the design of an environment can better respond to children's diverse needs and create new opportunities for participation."



Reflecting on this small change, shows how the structure remains accessible from different sides while creating a clearer boundary around the water. This encourages children to pause, navigate their play and make a more deliberate choice about whether to enter, remain outside or move between the two areas. It supports participation without controlling how children chose to use the water or what purpose their play might take.

Supporting Inclusion and Community Engagement through Water Play

By Dr Esther Joosa

At Open Minds Open Doors (OMOD) Kids Space, water play has become a regular part of the programme. By gradually introducing water through different materials and play environments, OMOD provides opportunities for children to develop familiarity, confidence, agency and shared enjoyment through water play. These sensory experiences can also help prepare children and families for participation in community spaces involving water and nature.

Singapore has a growing number of places offering free water play. These spaces invite children to pour, splash, fill, empty and experiment while discovering movement, volume, and cause and effect. Water play can strengthen motor skills, coordination and sensory awareness. It can also support communication, problem-solving, social interaction and inclusion. Children may need time and repeated experiences to become familiar and comfortable with these different conditions.

As public water play spaces may present unfamiliar sounds, movements, people and social situations, experiences within OMOD can give children and families opportunities to develop familiarity and confidence before exploring water play within the wider community.

Accessible, open-ended experiences allow children to draw on familiar play experiences and participate in their own ways. Bringing children into community play spaces allows them time to repeat actions, test ideas and follow their curiosity, while parents can observe carefully, recognise their child's growing capabilities and respond with greater confidence.

For example, families can explore public water play areas such as the water play area at the Jacob Ballas Children's Garden, Singapore Botanic Gardens, or the Far East Organization Children's Garden at Gardens by the Bay. Families are encouraged to check current opening days and hours before visiting.



OPEN MINDS OPEN DOORS

"OMOD is wrapping up for the year and we look forward to welcoming you again in 2027."

For enquiry, omod@playeum.com