Out is In!
How Outdoor Play Environments Bring Learning Outdoors

Presented by:

Jennie Sumrell, M.S.
Director of Education

Beth Wise
Editor-in-Chief
Learning Objectives

• Discuss research-based strategies for creating quality outdoor play environments that provide unique hands-on learning experiences that support creativity, imagination, and learning outdoors.

• Summarize developmentally appropriate play elements and design best practices that align with early childhood accreditations and requirements for outdoor play and learning environments.

• Outline a variety of resources and ideas to extend classroom learning outdoors in areas such as creative arts, circle time, math, dramatic play, science, literacy/language, music, sensory-motor, sand/water, and social and motor skills.
Community Benefits of Play

Play is the foundation for learning...

- Growth and development
- Healthy physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development
- Enjoyment and emotional fulfillment
- Creativity, individuality, and imagination

Play fosters communities who...

- Value the benefits of play
- Support people of all ages and abilities
- Connect with the wonders of the natural world
- Learn through meaningful experiences
- Engage in physical activity and healthy life balance
- Promote creativity and imagination
- Create passionate members of society

Play contains all developmental tendencies... and is itself a major source of development... Children are at their highest level of development when they are at play.

Vygotsky, 1978
Developmental Benefits
Powerful effects on the whole child

- Intellectual and academic learning
- Mood and memory
- Stress relief
- Disease preventative
- Heath and healing
- Self-esteem and self-confidence
- Social interaction
- Sensory stimulation
- Exploration and discovery
- Language and communication
- Attention restoration

Free, spontaneous play and outdoor playscapes, both natural and built, are essential for the fitness, health, and development of children and for their adaptation to their culture, society, and world.

- Dr. Joe Frost
THE MIND
Cognitive Development

- Ideas & problem solving
- Logical & critical reasoning
- Language & symbolic thought
- Exploration & interaction
- Imagination & dramatic play
- Abstract Thinking
- Ability to focus & control behavior
THE BODY
Physical Development

- Physical fitness/strength
- Gross & fine motor
- Flexibility
- Aerobic & muscular endurance
- Perceptual-motor development (hand-eye)
- Basic, refined, and coordinated movement skills (locomotor, manipulative & balancing)
THE SPIRIT
Social-Emotional Development

• Communication/Expression of feelings
• Cooperation/Sharing/Turn-Taking
• Negotiation/Compromise/Conflict resolution
• Assertion
• Concepts of friendship, love, & belonging
• Moral judgments
• Play signals
• Trust
• Leadership
• Self-expression
• Self-esteem
• Self control
• Compassion/Empathy

It is through play that we share our abilities, make contact with our deepest self, and unleash our potential.
- Dr. Nilda Coso
PLAY

physical

social

cognitive

communication

sensory
Learning
Intimately Engaging Young Minds

- Cross-curricular
- Individual interests and learning styles
- Creative, adaptive, and problem-solving functions of the brain
- Learning, memory, concentration, and mood impact directly can influence academic performance
- Establishing relationships with the environment and its people
- Develop strengths and experience successes
- Dynamic, relevant, and developmentally appropriate

The out-of-door environment holds particular potential for mediating children's social, emotional, and intellectual learning in distinct ways not possible in the traditional indoor classroom.

- Dr. Kathleen Burriss
Aligning to Early Childhood Accreditation Requirements

Outdoor play areas, designed with equipment that is age & developmentally appropriate & that is located in clearly defined spaces with semiprivate areas where children can play alone or with a friend, accommodate:

- Motor experiences such as running, climbing, balancing, riding, jumping, crawling, scooting or swinging.

- Activities such as dramatic play, block building, manipulative play, or art activities.

- Exploration of the natural environment, including a variety of natural & manufactured surfaces, & areas with natural materials such as nonpoisonous plants, shrubs & trees

- Adaptations are provided so children with disabilities can fully participate in the outdoor curriculum and activities

NAEYC Accreditation Criteria

Physical Environment

Outdoor Environmental Design

Standard #9
Alignment to Early Childhood Accreditation Requirements

Gross Motor Equipment

- Accessible for at least one hour a day
- Access without a long wait
- Equipment stimulates a variety of skills (balancing, climbing, ball play, pedal toys, etc.)
- Adaptations made or special equipment for children with disabilities.
- Both stationary and portable gross motor equipment used.
- Stimulates skills on different levels (Ex. ramp and ladder access to structure)
Aligning to Early Childhood Accreditation Requirements

Activities

- **Fine Motor**- Many developmentally appropriate fine motor materials of each type

- **Art**- Many and varied art materials

- **Music**- Available as both a free choice and group activity

- **Blocks**- Some block play available outdoors, block area accessible for play for substantial portion of the day

- **Sand and Water**- Provisions for indoors and outdoors daily, variety of toys accessible for play

- **Dramatic Play**- Props provided for active play outdoors, props around themes accessible for substantial portion of the day.

- **Nature/Science**- Materials are accessible for a substantial portion of the day, and everyday events used as a basis for learning about nature

- **Math/Number**- daily activities used to promote skills
The Domains
The 11 Domains represent the overarching areas of child development and early learning essential for school and long-term success. The eight domains of the original Framework, listed below, are retained and in some cases renamed. The domains in the revised Framework are:

1. Physical Development & Health
2. Social & Emotional Development
3. Approaches to Learning
4. Language Development
5. Literacy Knowledge & Skills
6. Mathematics Knowledge & Skills
7. Science Knowledge & Skills
8. Creative Arts Expression
9. Logic & Reasoning
10. Social Studies Knowledge & Skills
11. English Language Development
1. Key Features of Quality Spaces

* No ranking or sequence *

- Multipurpose, Open Space
- Anchored Play Equipment
- Wheeled Toys
- Manipulative Equipment
- Water Play
- Music and Movement/Acoustic Play
- Sand Play
- Balance Beam/Stepping Stones
- Play House
- Flower or Vegetable Garden
- Loose Parts
- Climbing Tree
- Climbing/Rolling Mound
- Raised Deck/Stage

Only one aspect of a Quality Play Space
Research-Based Best Practices & Considerations

Designing Quality Outdoor Play and Learning Environments

- Diversity
- Variety
- Developmental Challenge
- Nature
- Physical Activity
- Inclusion
Physical & Social Variables

- 4 processes that interact to promote the growth of intelligence:
  - Maturation
  - Physical interaction with objects in the environment
  - Social transmissions of knowledge through experiences with people
  - Equilibration (constructing knowledge by organizing & relating experiences)

2 of the 4 can be directly influenced
- physical perceived knowledge
- socially transmitted knowledge

Piaget (1952)
Keep it in Perspective

-Adult-functional:
Explanations & descriptions about the functions & values of play – facilitating healthy development

-Child-experiential:
Personal, experiential value is of equal, if not greater, importance

Types & Forms of Play

TYPES
• Autonomous
• Parallel
• Associative
• Cooperative

FORMS
• Object Play/Exploration
• Sensorimotor
• Dramatic Play
• Symbolic Play
• Construction
• Loose Parts Play
• Organized Games
• Work-Play Activities
Develop appropriate environments that address the needs of the whole child!
SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL

Under deck activities and dramatic play elements encourage children to think creatively and use their imagination.

Seating areas around, under, and on play structures offer a place to socialize, rest, or observe until emotionally ready to engage.

Signage and unique play elements can create an atmosphere of respect and acceptance and promote cultural/disability awareness.
Pathways, natural elements, loose parts, ground level, and freestanding activities encourage higher levels of physical activity.

Play activities that promote fine and gross motor skills and others that require varied operating force, provide choices for how to play.

Beginning, intermediate, and advanced level play events encourage children to move along a developmentally appropriate continuum of skills.
Consistent multisensory cues, using contrasting colors, landscaping, and textures for orientation and exploration help organize the playscape.

Crawl tubes and under-deck activities provide spaces for sensory relief, while activities such as spinning, rocking, or swinging provide sensory input.

Natural materials such as child-friendly plants and sand and water provide elements that stimulate the senses.
Activities that appeal to a variety of interests give children ways to make choices and demonstrate what they know at their level.

Play activities that provide auditory, visual, or tactile feedback reinforce and develop the understanding of cause and effect.

Creative opportunities to bring learning outdoors can support development in new and exciting ways.
COMMUNICATION

- Play activities, talk tubes, and interactive games encourage children to communicate, cooperate, and/or vocalize.
- Music activities provide children a way to contribute to the sounds of the play environment.
- Creative play elements enable children to demonstrate understanding and develop vocabulary.
Inclusion
Providing Equal Opportunities for Physical and Social Play

• Make a *fundamental statement* about how you value and believe in every child’s right to play!

• Recognize the *strengths, individuality, dignity,* and *abilities* of people of all ages and abilities!

• Encourage *equal* play opportunities, full *participation* in active play, and promote *independence*!

• Address *social and physical* inclusion
7 Principles of Inclusive Playground Design

Best Practices for Creating Meaningful Play Environments for People of All Ages and Abilities

So that ...
EveryBODY Plays!

fair
included
smart
independent
safe
active
comfortable
Resources: Inclusion
Providing Equal Opportunities for Physical and Social Play
Nature
Infusing the Natural World into the Everyday Spaces of Childhood

- Intellectual, emotional, and psychological well-being
- Independent mobility & connectivity
- Physical activity, fitness, and health
- Social interaction
- Rich sensory experiences
- Learning and hands-on experiences
- Increased play value
- Creativity, imagination, dramatic play
- Inclusion
- Stress reduction
- Increased attention and focus
- Intellectual, emotional, and psychological well-being
- Self-esteem, self-confidence

If we are going to solve the problem of sedentary childhood, we have no choice but to refocus intense professional attention on design for outdoor free play in everyday naturalized settings.

- Robin Moore
NATURE PLAY SCHEMA
Infusing Nature into Everyday Spaces of Childhood

UNDESIGNED
In The Woods
- Immersion in Nature
- Wildlife Exploration
- Discovery & Interaction

INTENTIONAL DESIGN STRATEGIES
Natural Play Spaces
- Playing with Nature
- Intentional Activity Settings
- Manipulating Nature Elements

Naturalized Playgrounds
- Bring Nature to People
- Integrating Living and Built Environment
- Physical Activity

Playful Pathways
- Bring People to Nature
- Community Connectivity
- Environmental Literacy
Physical Activity

- Natural pattern of physical activity in children – short bursts of activity of mostly moderate-intensity exercise interspersed with brief periods of very vigorous exercise

- Active Start- Physical Activity Guidelines for Children Birth to Five Years

- 60 minutes to several hours of positive physical play daily

- Impacts:
  - academic achievement
  - lifelong healthy habits
  - Bone growth and development
  - muscle strength
  - lungs and heart health
  - happiness
  - self-confidence
  - endurance and flexibility
1 in 3 children are overweight.

33% of kids watch more than 3 hours of TV.

Kids eat 50% of recommended vegetables.

1 of 3 meals are fast food.

30% more in health cost.

Portions 2 to 5 times bigger.

Snack sizes have grown.

Drink less, pop more water.

Choose healthier choices.

Increase active play 60 minutes.

United States Centers for Disease Control, 2013
6 Essential Elements of Physical Activity

- Brachiating/Upper Body
- Balancing
- Climbing
- Swinging
- Sliding
- Spinning
Loose-Part Play

• Empowers creativity
• Encourages cooperation
• Offers multisensory hands-on experiences
• Encourages children to plan, organize, discuss, build, create, and design their own games and rules
• Child-directed play helps translate abstract images in their minds to concrete examples
• Motivates and inspires movement
• Promotes communication and discussion
• Addresses individual learning styles
• Promotes a sense of power, control, mastery, self-esteem, responsibility and ownership

“Portable materials or “loose parts” are essential to developing more broadly based, creative, developmentally sound play environments that allow and stimulate spontaneous play.”

-Dr. Joe Frost, Child Development Expert
Natural Materials

• bamboo poles
• bark wedges
• straw bales
• small stones
• log stumps
• tree cookies
• trimmed branches
• pine cones
• leaves
• seed
• nuts
• flowers
• wood chips
• and many more
Equipment Selection

Developmentally appropriate?

Promote healthy risk-taking?

Variety and diversity of play activities available?

Beginning, intermediate, advanced opportunities?

Address the developmental domains?

Intentionally promote social interaction?

Promote physical activity through play?

Opportunities to engage with nature?

Promote inclusion?

Opportunities for loose-parts to be used?

Additional learning opportunities?
## Putting it all together

Use our convenient worksheet to assess the quality of your outdoor play environment, identify areas of strength and need, and help set priorities to add a variety of equipment that support these learning categories.

### Playground Equipment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item #</th>
<th>Catalog Page #</th>
<th>Under 2 Area</th>
<th>Gardening</th>
<th>Cozy Spots</th>
<th>Creative Arts</th>
<th>Circle Time</th>
<th>Gross Motor</th>
<th>Outdoor Classroom</th>
<th>Math &amp; Counting</th>
<th>Music &amp; Movement</th>
<th>Play Village</th>
<th>Dramatic Play</th>
<th>Science</th>
<th>Sand &amp; Water</th>
<th>Motion &amp; Sensory</th>
<th>Literacy &amp; Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MEC-024</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*My Existing Equipment*

---

Outdoor Play & Learning Environment

Under 2 Area
Page 12

Gardening
Page 20

Cozy Spots
Page 12

Creative Arts
Page 10

Circle Time
Page 10

Gross Motor
Page 21

Outdoor Classroom
Page 10

Literacy & Language
Page 16

Motion & Sensory
Page 19

Math & Counting
Page 16

Play Village
Page 8

Dramatic Play
Page 13

Science
Page 11

Sand & Water
Page 14
Outdoor Play and Learning Centers

- Multipurpose • Social • Nature
- Gardening
- Manipulative Equipment
- Social & Emotional Development
- Fixed Play Equipment
- Music
- Creative Arts Expression
OUT IS IN!
Play-Work Continuum

- Free Play
- Guided Play
- Directed Play
- Work

“In order to use play effectively as a curricular tool, adults must have an intellectual understanding of the connections between play and learning. In addition, they must have personal experience of the power of play to enrich their own lives.”

-Doris Bergen (1998). *Play as a Medium for Learning and Development*. ACEI.
3 Central Beliefs = Success

1. Involve a playful instructor

2. Offer learning benefits

3. Make activities F-U-N!

Combining playground equipment, a creative program, and an enthusiastic facilitator can greatly enhance your programming efforts!
“Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. But for children play is serious learning. Play is really the work of childhood.”

- Fred Rogers
• physical
• social
• emotional
• communicative
• sensory
• cognitive
Sand & Water

Materials:
• cups, sifters, shovels, rakes, buckets
• dinosaurs, or other small objects

Objectives:
• Explore volume (empty and full).
• Measure fractions (half, quarter, whole).
• Compare weights
• Find hidden objects.
Science

Ramp It Up

Materials:
- boards or cardboard of different lengths and widths
- objects that roll or slide
- playground equipment (optional)

Objectives:
- Trace an object’s motion.
- Observe properties of different objects.
Gross Motor

Materials:
• yardsticks, traffic cones, beams
• game and playground equipment

Objectives:
• Use words to describe relative location (over, under, through, in)
• Use space and materials creatively.
• Plan and carry out a sequence of actions.
Math

Materials:
- shallow tub
- soap, water, glycerin
- chenille stems

Objectives:
- Identify shapes.
- Discuss properties of shapes.
- Make predictions, observe, draw conclusions.

Bubble Shapes
Dramatic Play

Materials:
• “The Three Little Pigs”
• character tags, tape or headbands with wolf ears or pigs ears

Objectives:
• Apply creative ideas from peers and adults.
• Act out imaginary roles.
• Retell a story in the correct sequence.
• Understand character, setting, and plot.
Music

Materials:
• pairs of rhythm sticks
• buckets or large cans
• playground equipment (optional)

Objectives:
• Apply creative ideas from peers and adults.
• Identify and perform rhythmic patterns.
• Listen for different purposes.
• Participate in musical activities.
Art

Materials:
• paint brushes, spray bottles, paint, chalk paper, easels, tape

Objectives:
• Express self by participating in art activities.
Gardening

Materials:
• Seeds, dirt, watering cans, hand shovels

Objectives:
• Predict, observe, discuss, test, draw conclusions.
• Explore changes in nature.
Managing the Centers
Let's Go Outside!

Activity Title: ________________________________________________

Playground Equipment Needed: __________________________________

Approximate Time Needed for Activity/Day ________________________

Special setup(s)/game(s) for outside play _________________________

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

Description of Activity: _______________________________________

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

Additional Books, Materials, Loose Parts Needed:

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

Developmental Domains/Academic Areas Addressed:

________________________________________________________________
Culmination of a Unit
Other Play Inspirations

• Habitat/Animal Creations
• Team Building & Game On
• Shape Up
• What’s for Dinner?
• Art Design and Innovation
• Body Parts & Systems
• Responsibility
• Soar into Space
• Draw a Picture
• Around the World
• Community
• Safety First
• Math Mania
HELPFUL RESOURCES

Standards-based playground activities that stimulate creativity, imagination, and learning!

- 100 Activity Cards
- Activity Guide
- Preschool-5th Grade

- 20 Activity Cards
- Activity Guide
- Preschool
## Arrow Game

**Activity:** Children play a version of a Native American throwing game.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Easy</th>
<th>Challenge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explain that long ago, some Native American children practiced their throwing skills by throwing wooden arrows. Have children make their own &quot;arrows&quot; by rolling newspaper into a cone, shaping it, and using tape or a rubber band to secure it. Suggest that children decorate their arrows so they can easily locate them after each throw.</td>
<td>Encourage children to think of ways to make the game more challenging. Brainstorm using the hoop as a target, adding the size of the hoop, spinning, or rolling the hoop to create a moving target. Also, how children look for large and small openings to play structures to use as &quot;targets.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stand the hoop upright, placing two cones around the hoop. Explain that the hoop is the target. To begin, children stand behind a line to throw their arrows into the hoop. Move the line back as children's throws become more accurate. After each child picks up their arrows, one at a time and counts aloud with children.</td>
<td>Have children line up behind you, take turns to the side of the target. Model how you hold your arrow at shoulder height, throw it as you walk or run past the target from the side. Have children take turns, scoring one point each time the arrow goes through the target.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask children what they could do to change the arrows to make them &quot;fly&quot; more accurately. For example, they might experiment with longer, shorter, or thinner arrows. What characteristics of the various arrows seemed to help them fly better?</td>
<td>Have children brainstorm other games they can play with the arrows and the hoop. For example, they could lay the hoop flat on the ground and toss their arrows, determining the distance. The child whose arrow lands closest to the center of the hoop wins!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**What You Need:**
- newspaper rubber bands, tape
- a hoop
- children's play equipment (optional)

---

**Social/Emotional Development:**
- Children balance on one foot, skip, gallop from a designated area to the hoop.
Correlation to National Standards

The activities on the Outdoor Creative Play and Learning cards are designed to help address the Common Core State Standards for older children and are also based on other established learning or performance objectives cited by the national associations included in the list below.

- Language Arts: Common Core State Standards
- Mathematics: Common Core State Standards
- Physical Education: Early Childhood Program Standards
- Creative Arts: National Standards for Arts Education
- Physical Education: Early Childhood Program Standards
- Science: Next Generation Science Standards
- Social Studies: National Association for the Education of Young Children

The chart on the following pages shows which skills are covered in each activity area. The numbers in the chart are linked to the objective that each skill is targeted towards.

Outdoor Creative Play and Learning

User Friendly Activity Guide

Preschool Assessment Checklist

Outdoor Creative Play and Learning
How will you advocate and communicate the importance of play bring learning outdoors?

Play offers dynamic, hands-on experiences that provide people of all ages opportunities to explore, learn, and make connections within their community, form meaningful relationships, and engage in the neighborhoods where they live. It is through play that we inspire the mental and emotional mind, motivate the physical body, and discover an awareness of spirit and equality. Now more than ever, it is critical to study play behavior, seek knowledge on the power of play, and promote best practices that advocate lifelong play across nations.
Thank You!

Jennie Sumrell, M.S.
Director of Education
jsumrell@playcore.com
www.playcore.com

Beth Wise
Editor-in-Chief
beth.wise@robert-leslie.com
www.investigatorclub.com