Engaging with Nature Play – the outdoor classroom

Stepping off the asphalt!

Jenny Dudgeon
Sustainability Learning Centre
What’s your story?
Play is the essence of learning -

Play is the highest form of research

— Albert Einstein
Without continuous hands-on experience, it is impossible for children to acquire a deep intuitive understanding of the natural world that is the foundation of sustainable development. ....A critical aspect of the present-day crisis in education is that children are becoming separated from daily experience of the natural world, especially in larger cities.”

- Natural Learning, Creating Environments for Rediscovering Nature’s Way of Teaching, Robin C. Moore and Herb H. Wong
Time in Nature is not leisure time, it’s an essential investment in our children’s health – Richard Louv
Nature play

– unstructured **play** outdoors – is vital to a healthy childhood. ...

**Nature play** is any activity that gets children active or thinking actively outdoors, with the end goal of building skills and ability to **play** without the need for parental or adult control.

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Nature Play in Early Years Education - Nature Play QLD

Nature Play is...

- Climbing a tree,
- exploring the bush,
- building a cubby or searching for shells or bugs.
- It's about being outdoors and using nature too:
- It is unstructured play (play without rules).
- At a park, reserve, forest, bushland area, national park, creek, river, beach or in a paddock or backyard.
Nature play and learning provides

- experiential opportunities
- allows children to respond positively to challenges to manage risk and cope with change
- supports skills including inquiry and experimentation
- Language development
- Physical wellbeing

- Critical thinking
- Respect for nature
- Resilience
- Inspiration
- Preserving nature
- Growth mindset
Loose parts theory began in 1970's with architect Simon Nicholson, who believed - loose parts in our environment empower our creativity.

In a school, backyard, council park or a reserve loose parts are materials that can be moved, carried, combined, redesigned, lined up, and taken apart and put back together in multiple ways.

Source: Let the Children Play
http://www.letthechildrenplay.net/2010/06/loose-parts-imaginationcreativity.html
Scandinavian Forest Schools

a long term sustained approach to outdoor learning.

Forest schools seek to encourage, motivate, engage and inspire children through positive outdoor experiences.

Forest schools are closely entwined with the concepts of free flow play and learning from play.

- Self-Awareness
- Self Regulation
- Intrinsic motivation
- Empathy
- Good social communication skills
- Independence
- A positive mental attitude, self-esteem and confidence.
60’s Reggio Emilia
Children are individuals who are independent capable of doing whatever it is they set their mind to. They are resourceful and intelligent.

Documentation...

The Hundred Languages

The child is made of one hundred.

The child has a hundred languages
a hundred hands
a hundred thoughts
a hundred ways of thinking
of playing, of speaking.

A hundred.
Always a hundred
ways of listening
of marveling, of loving
a hundred joys
for singing and understanding
a hundred worlds
to discover
a hundred worlds
to invent
a hundred worlds
to dream.
The child has a hundred languages
(and a hundred hundred hundred)
but they steal ninety-nine.
The school and the culture separate the head from the body. They tell the child:
to think without hands
to do without head
to listen and not to speak
to understand without joy
to love and to marvel
only at Easter and at Christmas.
They tell the child:
to discover the world already there
and of the hundred
they steal ninety-nine.
They tell the child:
that work and play
reality and fantasy
science and imagination
sky and earth
reason and dream
are things
that do not belong together.
And thus they tell the child
that the hundred is not there.
The child says:
No way. The hundred is there.

~Loris Malaguzzi
Founder of the Reggio Emilia Approach
United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

1990’s The Convention changed the way children are viewed and treated – i.e., as human beings with a distinct set of rights instead of as passive objects of care and charity. The commitment to advancing children’s rights. 1990 adopted by Australia

2008 Melbourne Declaration:
Educational Goals for all Children
Goal 2: All young Australians to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens
• have the knowledge, skills, understanding and values to establish and maintain healthy, satisfying lives
• are responsible global and local citizens.
Strengthen early years education and partnerships
• ‘close the gap’ for young Indigenous Australians
Bronfrenbrenner’s Ecological Model of the Child

Current influence DoE Early Years
US: Children and Nature Movement 2005

FREE activities with park admission!
Throughout Indiana, nature centers are hosting Nature Play Days in partnership with the Indiana Children and Nature Network. All of the listed activities are free to the public with park admission and designed to get families and children playing and exploring outdoors.

Nature Play Days

Earth Discovery Center
Eagle Creek Park
5901 Delong Rd, Indianapolis, IN 46254
317-327-7148

Ornithology Center
Eagle Creek Park
6515 Delong Rd, Indianapolis, IN 46254
317-327-2473

Last Child in the Woods
Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder
Richard Louv
Recipient of the Audubon Medal
Australian Nature Play

Nature Play WA
GETTING OUR KIDS OUTDOORS

THINGS TO DO  PROGRAMS  RESOURCES  SERVICES

DISCOVER MORE OUTDOOR
What about Risks?

Only 19% of Australian young people meet the national daily physical activity guidelines
(1 hr per day)

Developmentally our children NEED challenge, adventure and uncertainty.

Reasonable Risk taking:

• Builds emotional regulation skills
• Develops decision making, planning and judgement skills
• Improves self control, confidence and self esteem
• Promotes perseverance, coping skills and independent thinking.
• When a child takes a risk they aren’t being reckless. They are making analytical decisions and shaping pathways in the brain for skills needed to negotiate larger stressors.
List 3 issues, challenges or concerns relating to children and families in your community?

List some ideas that can be used to initiate change? Who would it involve in your community?

List three programs, projects or strategies that have a positive impact with children and families in the community?

Is there a place for nature play strategies in your community programs or plans?
Activating Nature Play in your area?

What are the opportunities?
What’s happening in your area?
Brainstorm
Possible networks and events.

- Tasmanian Nature Play Networks
  - Schools
- Playgroups/Children’s Services
  - Junior Landcare
  - Discovery Ranger program
  - Wildcare
- Early Years Educators Professional groups
- Events
  - Outdoor Classroom Day  Children’s Week October
  - Families Week March April  Endangered Species day
I’ve been dreaming about coming here.

Jack aged 5
I wish every day was Tuesday.

Shakayla age 7
It’s like having a drink bottle from the sky.

Matilda age 6
Summary of key benefits

Children who play regularly in natural settings are sick less often. Mud, sand, water, leaves, sticks, pine cones and gum nuts can help to stimulate children's immune system as well as their imagination.

Children who spend more time outside tend to be more physically active and less likely to be overweight.

Children who play in nature have more positive feelings about each other.

Source: Children and Nature Network https://www.childrenandnature.org/
Summary of key benefits continued

Children who play in natural settings play in more diverse, imaginative and creative ways and show improved language and collaboration skills. Single use, repetitive play equipment becomes boring quickly.

Children who play in natural settings are more resistant to stress; have lower incidence of behavioural disorders, anxiety and depression; and have a higher measure of self-worth.

Natural, irregular and challenging spaces help kids learn to recognise, assess and negotiate risk and build confidence and competence.

Source: Children and Nature Network https://www.childrenandnature.org/
Summary of key benefits continued

Bullying behaviour is greatly reduced where children have access to diverse nature-based play environments.

Symptoms of Attention Deficit Disorder are reduced after contact with nature.

Source: Children and Nature Network https://www.childrenandnature.org/
Learning in Nature provides

- Deep learning
- Language development
- Physical wellbeing
- Self-awareness
- Critical thinking
- Respect for nature
- Risk benefits
- Resilience
- Inspiration
- Preserving nature
- Multi-disciplinary learning
- Appreciating natures affordances
References


Department of Education Tasmania. (draft). *Brief. Indoor/Outdoor learning environments – birth to 8 years.*


“If we want children to flourish, to become truly empowered, then let us allow them to love the earth before we ask them to save it. Perhaps this is what Thoreau had in mind when he said, “the more slowly trees grow at first, the sounder they are at the core, and I think the same is true of human beings.”

- David Sobel
Beyond Ecophobia: Reclaiming the Heart in Nature Education 1998