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Welcome to the Play Australia Early Years Series

Early Years SERIES



Anne Houghton Bron Joslyn

Theories of Playspace Arrangement

Thursday 10 March - 4.00pm (AEDT)

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Theories of Play Space Arrangement: in the outdoors



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&

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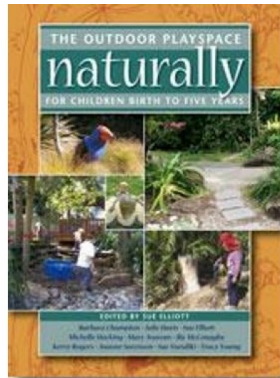
Acknowledgement to Country



“In a country where the outdoor lifestyle of bush and beach is iconic, it is a paradox that the next generation is increasingly cooped up indoors or playing in synthetic outdoor play spaces – places where there is not a tree to climb, a cicada nymph shell to discover or a mud pie to be moulded.

Is this what we want for our children?”

Elliot Sue (Editor) *The Outdoor Playspace naturally for Children Birth to Five Years*, (2009) NSW: Pademelon Press



Historical perspectives as influences on the importance of outdoor play

Educational theorists:

- ☐ Rousseau
- ☐ Froebel
- ☐ Steiner – all promoted nature in children's education

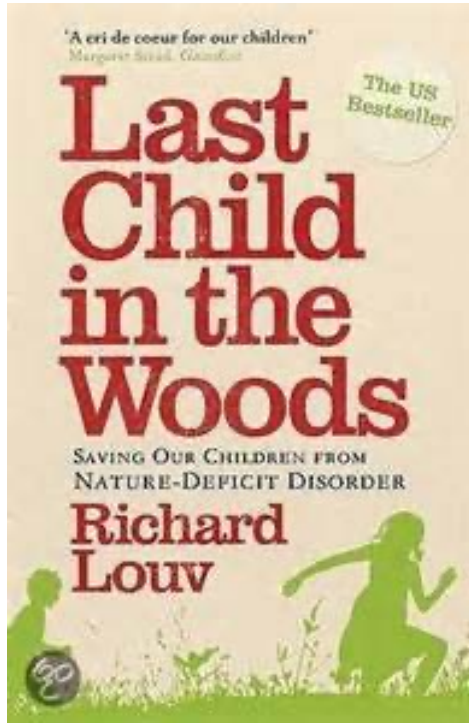
Other influences

- Reggio Emilia philosophy
- *'Environment as the Third Teacher'*
- Forest Schools
- Australian Folklore foundations in the bush
- Dreamtime stories
- Bush and Beach Kinder Programs
- Education for Environmental Sustainability



Bush Kinder

What research tells us



- Concerns re nature deficit
- Time to play is being eroded
- Access is evaporating
- Technology taking over
- Risk aversion society
- Nature connections under threat



Philosophy



- Values reflected in practice
- Voices of all
- **What might it look like?**

Consider your own philosophy
values and why they are important
to you

NQF, EYLF, VEYLDF

These documents guide our work



The Children's Services Regulations in Victoria changed in 2009 to include that:

'the outdoor space that is provided at a children's service **includes features that enable each child to explore** and experience the **natural environment**'..... 'that outdoor **spaces** include a range of different **natural features** such as **sand, soil, grass, a variety of different plantings and trees**.... allowing children to **touch and interact** with the natural environment in their **everyday play**'.

[Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.](#)

Importance of creating positive Inspiring spaces

Jim Greenman (1988)
reminded us that the
environment is more
than the physical setting.
**It includes people,
time, space,** and the
way these are utilised.



Learning environments include both indoor and outdoor spaces and resources

- They can be an **extension** of each other
- Consider **indoor/outdoor** programs
- **Responsive environments**
- They need to support the routines, materials and interactions that occur between children and adults



Let's look at some.... 'Theories of Play Space Arrangements'



Planning as a landscape painting: four layers of complexity (Hocking in Elliott (Ed), 2008)

Layer 1

Play space as a whole, the overall aesthetic impression that is gained from the first viewing...backdrop for children's play, but is not a backdrop in a static sense. It is dynamic and as such impacts on program planning and children's play

Layer 2

Well designed natural play spaces provide a range of defined smaller areas variously referred to as enclosed spaces, dens, garden rooms or habitats within the overall space... These provide foci for planning specific experiences

Layer 3

The third layer is the ***loose materials and equipment*** that an adult or child might add to these spaces to constitute the planned and spontaneous play experiences that are the 'nuts and bolts' of the program

Layer 4

The fourth layer is the ***prevailing and seasonal weather conditions***. Imagine looking out into a play space and being able to add another dimension to the program simply by responding to the weather conditions

1. Play Space as a Whole:

Design and Arrangement

- Consider placement of playground equipment and ease of access
- **Are changes needed?**
- **How might loose materials and equipment enhance the space?**



2. Well Designed Natural Play Spaces

- Areas for children's projects and creations
- Inclusive play spaces
- Small, active groups
- For encouraging interaction and relationship building
- Private, quiet spaces
- Multilevel areas
- Wet and dry areas
- Pathways
- Natural
- Enhance and define spaces
- Habitats for living things



Provide opportunities for connecting with nature



- Positive attitudes
- Respect for the environment
- Children become involved in ideas
- Problem solving
- Social interaction
- Emotional wellbeing
- Physical values
- **How might you add natural materials within your play spaces?**

Importance of unhurried and unstructured time

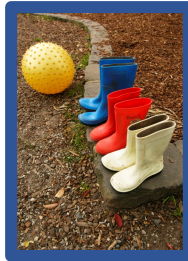
Children "need the freedom to move from one activity to another as their tastes dictate, they need **uninterrupted time** to build a play situation through to its satisfying completion, and they need enough materials to furnish a challenge and provide a feeling of sufficiency."

(Hendrik, 1996, p424).



3. Loose materials and equipment

- Equipment
- Effective Supervision
- Planning for play and learning



Source:
ballymorekindy.com.
au



Active Open

Quiet

Practical strategies to develop programs

- Allow **time for exploration** with flexible routines
- Take children's particular needs, skills and interests into account
- Less is best is a good guide (can build on accessory materials over time)
- Children will make the space their own
- Access to materials, tools and props for children themselves



Play and Learning

- Exploration: opportunities in how things work
- An understanding of cause and effect
- Trial and error
- Investigation of the properties of materials
- Use of materials to represent & create their own imaginative ideas



Spontaneous Sciencing

- Could be teacher-led exploration
- Characteristics of animals & habitats
- Life cycles of plants
- Patterns of nature
- Unplanned events inside or outside
- **Can lead to a myriad of ideas**



Gardening experiences

- Provide opportunities for honing of literacy, eco literacy, and numeracy skills
- Hands on experimentation with scientific principles
- Opportunities for reading, planting and cultivating instructions
- Labelling plants, counting seeds, and measuring spaces between plants and measuring and recording growth



Plants provide:

- Shade, shelter & wind protection
- Screening/privacy
- Enclosed & separate spaces
- Habitat for birds, insects & other life forms
- Loose play materials
- Aesthetics
- Opportunities for observation
- Seasonal changes



4. Prevailing and Seasonal Weather conditions

- *“No such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing!”*
- Use weather opportunities for meaningful learning
- Access to hats & clothing
- Weather conditions
- Sunsmart policy
- Responsibilities for educators to promote active play
- Relaxed routines rather than rigid!



Educator Role

- Intentional teaching (**balance** of both child led and adult led)
- Scaffold children's learning
- Notice, recognise and respond
- Advocate for the value of outdoor play
- Embed sustainability into daily routines & practices



Children have opportunities in Early Childhood settings to have hands-on contact with nature.

Indoor and outdoor environments have potential to provide the experience. However, increasingly, providing opportunities is a challenge for educators in some settings.

What might the challenges be?

What ideas might you take away from this session?

Conclusion:

Acknowledge your progress

- Celebrate your achievements
- Notice the shifts in thinking and embedding practices
- Notice how children become influenced
- Document positive significant learning
- **Accept that it's an ongoing process with the spaces ever evolving**



References & Resources

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