

The Outdoor Classroom Project
An Initiative of the Child Educational Center


Brain Development, Learning and Reasonable Risk: The Benefits of the Outdoor Classroom

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Project Goal



“Increase the quantity, quality, and benefit of outdoor experiences for children”

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A story from your childhood...



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The Silent Emergency

7 Challenges to Children

1. Lack of exercise & good nutrition
2. Preoccupation with electronic media
3. Perceived lack of safe places to play outside
4. Isolation from and fear of nature
5. Lack of interest in and understanding of interconnectedness of things including nature and mans impact on it
6. Current trends toward a one dimensional approach to ECE – the loss of play
7. The use of behavior modifying drugs on young children

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4 Principles of OCP


TIME - Children benefit from spending substantial time outdoors.

ACTIVITIES - Even with a minimally developed yard, there are very few children’s activities that cannot be done outside.

INITIATION - Children’s development is optimized when they spend a significant amount of time participating in child-initiated activities that are teacher-supported.

NATURE - Children need a connection to nature in order to be whole.

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Anything and everything can be learned in a quality outdoor classroom. But there are many learning experiences for children that cannot happen indoors.

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When we keep children inside for long periods of time we are robbing them of the wonderfully rich and thought provoking experiences they could be experiencing in the outdoor classroom: robbing them, in essence, of the opportunities to learn.

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7

Children in well designed outdoor spaces can have safe access to a wide variety of sights, sounds, textures and even tastes that will expand their working knowledge of the world around them and give them the foundations for learning.



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8

A Word About Risk:

As safe as necessary,
not as safe as possible.



Danger is part of life. Practice assessing and managing it - as a child - creates competent and capable adults.
Policies meant to protect kids from all potential risk are the real danger. Our kids are choking on safety.
Lynne
Wells-Andrews
Frederick, 2016

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9

What is a risk?

Hazard vs Risk:

“Hazards are objects which children cannot see or be expected to avoid, while risks are those experiences and objects that are out in the open and obvious.”

Joan Almon

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What do risk and adventure look like in the outdoor classroom?

- Physical risk
- Risk with materials
- Risk in weather
- As safe as necessary, not as safe as possible
- Trust children to be competent, to learn, to problem-solve and to manage themselves

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Skill Development

- Kinesthetic
- Creative Movement
- Interpersonal
- Math
- Science
- Literacy
- Construction & Engineering

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Kinesthetic

agility	motor planning	smelling
back and forth rhythm (swings, rocker)	moving to music/feeling rhythm	sounds - music
balancing	muscle memory	sounds of nature
bending	non-locomotor movement	squatting
body as a tool	holding objects	standing
dexterity	reaching	strength
eye-hand coordination	stirring	textures
full body exploration	moving arms	throwing
grasping/grabbing	pinching	vestibular input
lifting	pointing	
locomotor/moving body through space	pulling/pushing	
climbing	pumping on swings	
walking	purposeful movement	
running	dancing, yoga, etc.	
tip toes	sitting	

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Creative Expression

- 3 dimensional art
- color
- comparing
- contrasting
- creativity
- engaging the senses
- experiencing different media
- imagination
- kinesthetic
- line
- pitch
- problem solving
- rhythm
- sense of self
- sound discrimination
- texture
- tone

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Interpersonal

accepting ideas of others	peer problem solving
assigning roles	peer scaffolding
authentic play	reciprocal conversations
being sensitive to the needs of others	reciprocal play
building relationships	role play
caring of/for others	seeking social interactions
communicating needs, desires, feelings	shared (common) knowledge
communication of ideas	shared experience
competitive engagement	shared interest
compromising	shared leadership
conflict resolution	shared purpose
cooperation	shared tasks
empathy	sharing home (past) experiences
following	sharing knowledge
inclusion of others	sharing space
invitation to play	social cooperation
leading	social expectations (please, thank you)
learning to share	social understanding
mutual engagement	turn taking
negotiating	using each other's ideas
	working together/collaboration

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Construction & Engineering

balance	piling
base construction	positioning
bracing	propping
bridging	ramping
changing shape/arrangement	stability
cornering/angles	stacking
covering	supporting
elevation	tunneling
filling/emptying	visual-spatial skills
making equal	
making enclosures	
making lines	
making openings	
making walls	
perimeter/interior	

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Math

addition/subtraction	measurement
angles	numeral recognition
area	one to one
attributes	opposites
classification	perimeter
colors	patterns
diameter	positional words (top, bottom)
distance	positive/negative spaces
estimation	quantity - numbers
experiencing parallel	quantity words - more, less, enough, lots
experiencing perpendicular	sequencing/order
experiencing quantity	size
geometry	sorting
high/low	space
inside/outside	speed - rate of movement
length	symmetry
	time
	weight
	whole/part

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Science

absorption	insects/bugs
analysis	life cycle/life and death
balance	living creatures (including humans)
cause and effect	mass
centrifugal force	nature
change shape/arrangement	night/day
classification	pendulum
close observation	positive/negative space
color discrimination	predicting
compare and contrast	repeating an experiment
conservation/consumption	respect/reverence/caring for the environment
consistency of materials	sound
degrees of intensity	speed
dynamics	sunlight/shadows
experimenting	synchronization
force/resistance	vibration
forming hypotheses/theories	volume
gravity	water
inquiry	weather
	weight

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