



Presented by ...Ros Patterson, Elwyn Morey Centre

# Outdoor Play

## Not Just the Exercise Yard



## The Exercise Yard

- **Is it even that?**
- **What should it be?**
- **Who decides what outdoor play will look like in our programs?**



## **What's new to say about outdoor play?**

**Is it different from 5, 10, 20, 30 years ago?**

**What has changed?**

**No more**

- **climbing trees**
- **random climbing equipment in the yard**
- **bare feet**
- **visual judgement**
- **Going outside if it *might* rain**

**Vertical poles surrounded by foam**



## **Why are we seeing these changes?**

**Children's safety, now regulated**

**New Regulations**

**Children spending longer time in EC programs**

**We know more. eg. Sun Smart**

**Priority given to a range of specialist passive activities**



## **What will outdoor play be in the future?**

**Will we even have it in the program?**

**What's will its' priority be in the program?**

**Is it allocated the same planning, staffing  
and resourcing as indoor play?**



## Our challenges

**To:**

- **robust children and staff for the outdoors**
- **Not be limited by the physical yard**
- **Consider the learning environment as a whole**
- **Consider where children most want to be**



## **Outdoor play for Jaya**

**45 minutes of a 3.5 hour program (20%)**

**Jaya (5) running, running, some frenetic climbing, lots of shouting (to no-one in particular), no adult interaction.**



## **Outdoor play for Iyen**

**40 minutes of Iyen's morning (16%)**

**Iyen (3) wandering around playground,  
not engaged with any equipment or any  
one.**

**“Hi 5 Iyen” by staff on 2 occasions as he  
wandered past.**





## **Outdoor play for Tom**

**45 minutes of a morning program. (18%)**

**Tom, (3) occupied the best bike and only 'sit in' car at the same time.**

**He rode very fast amongst others, just missing them and pushing them aside if they tried to use the vacant vehicle.**

**Staff member asked if he wanted to go to the toilet (6 times in 20 mins)**



## **Outdoor play for Maddi**

- **60 mins of 4 hour program. (90% access to outdoors)**

**Maddi involved in several play areas then fetching and carrying buckets of water in a team from the tank. Small groups in sustained play in various areas indoors and out. Staff sitting, listening and talking to children.**



## **Outdoor play as an exercise yard...for children**

**As educators, we know that outdoor play provides many opportunities for the 5 learning outcomes for children identified in the VEYLDF**

**We can enrich the experiences of the children in previous examples.**

<b>Identity</b>	<b>Community</b>	<b>Wellbeing</b>
<b>Learning</b>	<b>Communication</b>	



## **Outdoor play as an exercise yard: the responsibility of adults is to.....**

- **Ensure access for all children**
- **Set the environment**
- **Provide structure and planning**
- **Engage with children**



## **Physical activity research at Gowrie Tasmania prompted by knowledge of:**

- **Prevalence of childhood obesity**
- **Physical activity patterns set in EC years**
- **Children's development**
- **Time spent in EC programs**
- **Research findings re social and emotional factors influencing children's physical activity**



# Playground design and children's physical activity

**Research project seeks to understand if and how playground design influences children's physical activity patterns.**

**Reflections Gowrie Australia Publication, autumn 2011, issue 42**

## **Desired outcomes of research project**

**That the playground design:**

- **Support physical and cognitive devt.**
- **Provide a natural environment**
- **Minimise the use of single purpose, fixed equipment**
- **Provide opportunities for increased physical activity**
- **Be a demonstration and research model**

## **Research update and findings.**

- **Unique opportunities for play & phys.activs**
- **Children evenly distributed over entire area**
- **Same distribution of girls and boys**
- **Most popular area natural spaces**
- **Moveable natural materials..imaginative play**
- **Sand least popular**
- **Limited use of paved areas**





## **Outdoors: more than an exercise yard**

**The outdoors is an integral part of the learning environment**

**Learning and development outcomes in VEYLDF can all be met indoors and outdoors .....a total learning environment**



## How to make it happen?

### **The social environment:**

- **Know the children**
- **Spaces for groups**
- **Spaces to be alone**
- **Planned opportunities for leader/follower**
- **Opportunities for child led play**
- **Educator involvement**



## How to make it happen

### **The physical environment:**

- **Include schedules and routines outdoors**
- **Create aesthetically attractive spaces**
- **Utilise entire space**
- **Ensure adequate time for outdoor play**
- **Include unstructured spaces..suggestion**
- **Provide access to resources**
- **Access to natural materials**



## How to make it happen

- 1. Collect information / observations**
- 2. Analyse**
- 3. Plan for possibilities**
- 4. Facilitate / teach**
- 5. Reflect**
- 6. Evaluate**



## How to make it happen

**Our responsibility is to ensure we provide outdoor opportunities beyond the exercise yard.**

**Put a coat on and go outside.**



## References

- **Elliot, Sue the Outdoor Play space Naturally for Children Birth to Five Years, Pademelon Press 2008**
- **Kindergarten Physical Activity Program, Department of Human Services Victoria 2007**
- **Reflections, Gowrie Australia Autumn 2011, issue 42 and Winter 2011 issue 43**
- **Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework**