

Learning Environment for Young Children

CLDDV: 123

Outdoor Environment

Agenda

- Announcements
- Lecture: Outdoor Environments
- The Dirty Dozen
- Group activity: Outdoor plans

Creating Outdoor Learning Environments

Is the outdoor learning environment as important as the indoor learning environment?

Creating Outdoor Learning Environments

- Benefits of the outdoors

Nature...

connects all life: universal and timeless

unpredictable: a breeze, clouds, wetness

multi-dimensional: shapes, sizes, colors, textures, smells, tastes

beauty and art: rocks, sand, rainbows, hills, leaves, flowers

Creating Outdoor Learning Environments

- Benefits of the outdoors

Nature...

provides sound: birds, wind, rain

creates spaces: with grass, bushes, trees, boulders

lives and dies: real life bugs, birds, flowers

nourishes and heals: our bodies need sunlight and fresh air

Creating Outdoor Learning Environments

- Benefits of the outdoors
 - children show a natural enthusiasm and curiosity when they play outside
 - adds balance to the day
 - allows children to experience the freedom of open space
 - allows children to use muscles in new ways

Creating Outdoor Learning Environments

- movement and change of atmosphere
reduce stress
- using the outdoors and the indoors as a classroom bridges the two environments
- teachers can enhance their growth through observation, interaction, and planned activities

Creating Outdoor Learning Environments

- Reluctance to use the outdoors...
 - **surroundings** may be harder to control
 - **weather** is uncomfortable
 - **perception** of exposure to harm
 - **openness** of area may be hard to supervise
 - **liabilities** (playground equipment)
 - the **rationale** that children need to spend more time indoors "learning" and less time outdoors "playing"

Creating Outdoor Learning Environments

- In general, direct experiences with nature are shrinking
- T.V., video games, fear of strangers, traffic, living spaces, lack of adult presence
- "Nature Deficit Disorder" Richard Louv
- Nature is being used as a type of therapy for ADHD

Creating Outdoor Learning Environments

- Environments should provide the child with the chance to be good at something...
 - opportunity to have challenges
 - opportunity to have mastery
 - opportunity to practice a new skill

We do this through...

- activities
- activity areas
- child size equipment
- natural surroundings

Creating Outdoor Learning Environments

- Outdoor Space should have...
 - easy access
 - a variety of surfaces and textures
 - opportunities for movement
- Consider pathways and barriers
 - they direct traffic
 - create boundaries
 - separate sand from sidewalk
 - need path from water to sand

Creating Outdoor Learning Environments

Role of the adult

- Adults should reflect on attitude towards the outdoors
- Provide opportunities for exploration
- Observe and make changes accordingly
- Be aware of any safety hazards (risk management)
- Repairs and maintenance are ongoing
- Avoid creating crowded areas

Creating Outdoor Learning Environments

Adults role continued...

- Ask what is the purpose or goal of area?
- Create spaces that meet the various developmental needs

Creating Outdoor Learning Environments

Areas of a child's development are enhanced through outdoor play and exploration

Physical development, social skills, cultural knowledge, emotional development and intellectual development

- **Physical Development**

- outdoor environments support

- large muscle development

- space allows for running, skipping, jumping,

- outdoor equipment encourages climbing, balance,

- coordination, and development of

- upper and lower body strength

Creating Outdoor Learning Environments

- Small motor skills
 - develop as children dig in the sand, collect small objects, and garden
- Spatial awareness
 - children discover how their bodies operate in space by swinging, climbing, and crawling
- Social skills
 - outside voices allowed
 - negotiate for riding toys
 - cooperate by giving pushing starts on swings, build and dig in the sand together

Creating Outdoor Learning Environments

- Children learn about their community by taking walks
 - observations
- Emotional Development
 - mastering a challenge
 - prolongs instant gratification
 - trust in self and others is fostered through real life experiences
 - expand dramatic play
 - appreciation of beauty leads to environmental awareness

Creating Outdoor Learning Environments

- Intellectual Development
 - children learn through direct interaction
 - science can be observed
 - children learn to observe and analyze
 - language development is expanded
 - expands imagination
- Safety
 - visibility/supervision
 - proper ground cover
 - boundaries of play areas are well defined
 - use visual cues: cones, signs, rope

Creating Outdoor Learning Environments

Safety Continued

- quiet activity area available
- shaded areas available
- rules established for climbing equipment, swings
- first-aid kit in close proximity
- enough equipment so children don't have to wait
- assign yard areas for staff to supervise
- remember that outside time is not teacher "break" time
- staff support children to learn at their own pace
 - * Do not force children to go beyond their ability

Creating Outdoor Learning Environments

- Safety
 - be plant smart, plant nonpoisonous plants
- Conduct safety checks
 - visually scan several times daily
 - check for debris
 - remove cracked or broken toys/equipment
 - rake sand, wood chips, cover at night
 - empty water tables after activity. Do not leave water tables unattended.

Creating Outdoor Learning Environments

- look for tripping hazards
- check for entrapments
- provide appropriate signs for safety

Creating Outdoor Learning Environments

- Playing areas
 - climbing structures (permanent and portable equipment)
 - sand and water
 - transportation (wheel toys)
 - quiet areas (blankets under shaded trees, tents with books)
 - woodworking
 - garden
 - storage
 - indoor areas extended outdoors
- Materials for Climbing Area
 - obstacle courses, ramps, bridges, platforms, slides, swings, teeter-totters, trees, tunnels

Creating Outdoor Learning Environments

- Sand Area
 - close to water source
 - cover sand area at the end of day
 - rake each daily
 - should be shaded
 - spray with water to limit dust

Materials:

buckets, shovels, scoops, trucks, plastic dishes, funnels, sifters, molds, natural objects, cardboard boxes

Creating Outdoor Learning Environments

- Things to consider...
 - Alternatives to sand
 - using bird seed, rice, cereal, corn, fabric scraps
 - * the use of food may be difficult for young children who have props that encourage pretend eating
 - * financially struggling families may view the use of playing with food wasteful
 - * consider what staff and families feels comfortable using
- Providing sand play outdoors can support the child with limited motor skills by providing larger areas to work in. focus should be on exploration instead of worrying about a mess!

Creating Outdoor Learning Environments

- Woodworking Area
 - requires careful supervision
 - in an out of the way place
 - specific instruction for tool use
- Materials
 - blocks, saws, cardboard boxes, boards, scraps of soft wood, steering wheels, large spool, wood sawhorses

Creating Outdoor Learning Environments

- Transportation Area
 - area should have a hard surface to allow for children to balance, pedal, negotiate turns, start and stop
 - include a variety of sizes
 - add props: signs, dress-up clothes, have a bike parade, bike wash, gas station.

Creating Outdoor Learning Environments

- Garden Area
 - small sunny area or use pots and containers
 - child size tools
 - seeds and plants (check for toxicity)
 - wheelbarrow
 - string and wood to mark off rows
 - access to water
 - markers, recycle plant containers, tongue depressors