Outdoor Play and Learning in Schools
Key Concepts

01 Why outdoor play & learning?
02 What is outdoor play & learning?
03 Who is involved?
04 The role of the educator
05 Where does it happen?
06 When does it happen?
07 How to get started
Why Outdoor Play and Learning?
**Why Outdoor Play & Learning?**

Overwhelmingly research has demonstrated the benefits of nature programming and nature involvement in the lives of young children.

Benefits include:

- Improved wellbeing, emotional regulation, interpersonal skills
- Reduced stress and increased development of protective factors associated with resilience (1)
- Greater developmental growth and personal initiative (2)
- Overall signs of increased happiness, better physical health outcomes, and greater creativity (3)

There is a growing body of research which indicates that many Canadian children do not experience healthy levels of physical activity, sleep, and screen time (4). This in turn has contributed to a growing awareness of the role and importance of nature and forest experiences across our Canadian education sector.
Why Outdoor Play & Learning?

Being outdoors is safer during COVID-19.

- In response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, health authorities across the country and around the world are recommending outdoor spaces as the safest place for social interaction (5).

- This is primarily due to the natural ventilation provided by air currents which rapidly dilute virus droplets while also providing more space to maintain proper social distancing protocols (6).

- In addition to this, physical activity – a cornerstone of active outdoor play – is a key factor in the prevention of any virus, including COVID-19 (7).

- There is also evidence that Vitamin-D – gained from exposure to sunlight – can mitigate the symptoms of COVID-19 (8).

- In a time of increased mental health issues among children, access to the outdoors can help mitigate some of the negative effects of stress and anxiety (9).
What is Outdoor Play & Learning?
Outdoor play & learning is...

Child-led, educator supported, unstructured play on and with the Land.

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CHILD AND NATURE ALLIANCE OF CANADA
What is Play?

Play is what children and youth do when they follow their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way, and for their own reasons (5).

Play is:

- **FREELY CHOSEN** (a child chooses when, if and how to play)

- **INTRINSICALLY MOTIVATED** (a child plays because they are motivated internally to do so)

- **PERSONALLY-DIRECTED** (a child individually and/or collectively directs their own play)

Outdoor play takes place in a very broad continuum of spaces that include urban, rural, suburban, and wilderness settings (Outdoor Play Canada Glossary of Terms, 2017).
The Play-Based Learning Continuum

Child Directed

FREE PLAY
INQUIRY PLAY
COLLABORATIVE PLAY

Teacher Directed

PLAYFUL LEARNING
LEARNING THROUGH GAMES

Source: www.playlearninglab.ca/types-of-play-based-learning
Free Play Can Look Like...
Who is Involved?
## Who is Involved?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Educators</th>
<th>Parents &amp; Caregivers</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Play</td>
<td>• Trust that the land will provide provocations and elicit learning opportunities</td>
<td>• Ensure that children are properly equipped with clothing that makes outdoor play comfortable and enjoyable</td>
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<td>• Learn</td>
<td>• Build trust with parents</td>
<td>• Build trust with children so parents can feel comfortable with children leading their own play</td>
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<td>• Experience joy and wonder</td>
<td>• Communicate learning and health value of outdoor play</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Communicate value of appropriate risk taking</td>
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<td>• Communicate about risk-benefit procedures as a way of building trust</td>
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Who is Involved?

**Principals & Administrators**
- Develop trust with educators they support
- Ensure educators are supported and receive proper training on outdoor play and learning
- Are aware challenges and try to resource educators
- Are able to communicate value of outdoor play and champion it

**The Land**
- Takes care of us and offers rich learning opportunities

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**Child**

**Educators**

**Parents**

**The Land**

**Principals & Administrators**

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The Role of the Educator
The Role of the Educator

- Observe
- Ask questions
- Narrate
- Document
- Make curriculum connections
- Engage in responsive and emergent planning
- Offer tools and resources
- Navigate risk
Where Does It Happen?
Where Does It Happen?

Anywhere and everywhere!
When Does It Happen?
When Does It Happen?

Anytime and in all weather!
Even in winter? Yes!

https://childnature.ca/meeting-people-where-they-are-at-in-the-winter/
How to Get Started
How to Get Started

- GO OUTSIDE AND LET KIDS PLAY!

- REFER TO THRIVE OUTSIDE RESOURCES (Learn more about risky play, how to make curriculum connections and more with this free resource hub: www.childnature.ca/thriveoutside)

- TAKE A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COURSE (The Child and Nature Alliance of Canada offers a Forest and Nature School Practitioners Course: www.childnature.ca/forest-school-canada)
Connect with Us
CHILD AND NATURE ALLIANCE OF CANADA

Website
www.childnature.ca

Email Address
admin@childnature.ca

Social Media
facebook.com/childnaturecanada
@childnaturecanada
@cnalliance
References


