

The Developmental Benefits of Outdoor Play

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Project Certification Page

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CERTIFICATION OF PROJECT WORK

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Abstract

Play is a pivotal part of a child's life. Outdoor play fosters opportunities for creativity, imagination, social learning and physical development. When children are given the opportunity to be engaged in outdoor play during the school day the effect is positive for both teacher and student. Children's direct experiences in outdoor play shape their development in the classroom. Even though these positives have been identified, many classrooms during the school day do not give the students a chance to learn in the outdoor environment. A qualitative study was designed to get experienced teachers opinion about the importance of outdoor play during classroom time. Understanding the overall benefits of play will create a better learning environment for the students and a better teaching environment for the educator.

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Introduction

The primary purpose of this study is to understand the positive effects children experience in unstructured outdoor play settings. In order to understand this, an effort to answer the following question is necessary:

-How do elementary teachers feel about the developmental benefits of outdoor play during the school day?

The research provided gives a foundation to begin understanding the importance of outdoor exposure for children of all ages. The literature review demonstrates the importance of outdoor play during the school day, but also shows a lack of adult understanding of the importance of outdoor play. There were four categories of focus in the literature review: whole child development, the unseen benefit of outdoor play, legislative mandates versus outdoor play, and play deprivation.

The four categories demonstrate the importance of outdoor play on child development and a rationale as to why outdoor play is not a main priority during the school day. A qualitative study will be conducted based on experienced teachers' responses to interview questions in regards to outdoor play during the classroom time. The ultimate goal is to provide enough information to exhibit the importance and effectiveness of outdoor play.

Review of the Literature

A review of the literature was conducted to provide information about the positive impacts outdoor play has on learning. Databases searched for this review were *Eric*, *EBSCO* and *Academic Search Complete*. The relevant themes throughout the literature include: the positives of unstructured play, the impacts of play deprivation, the positives of development in relation to the whole child meaning cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, and legislation in regards to play. The basics found were as follows: the foundation of learning begins with play. Research shows play is the most efficient, powerful and productive way to learn the information young children need (Wardle, 2008). Research also suggests the outdoor learning environment is an important element of the whole child and education of children (Olsen, Thompson, & Hudson, 2011). Finally, compiling the research demonstrates the importance and effectiveness of outdoor play.

Unstructured Play

Children's unstructured outdoor free-play or active free play, provides an opportunity for children to be active (Veitch, Salmon, & Ball, K. (2010). If children have access to a natural play environment there are many ways in which they will typically direct their play experiences without any adult guidance (Francis, Paige, & Lloyd, 2013). These types of play activities include: adventure, fantasy and imagination, animal allies, exploration, creation of special place, creation of small worlds, and hunting and gather which reintroduce and reconnect children with unstructured nature play (Francis, Paige, & Lloyd, 2013). A study was based on 149 parochial-school students ranging from kindergarten to eighth grade at an urban school (Holmes, 2012); the study showed, many children believe recess is part of the school day and enjoy it because it is

the only time they are free to do things and talk, without adult control (Holmes, 2012). After direct observation the study demonstrated that students in 1st and 2nd grade interact more in boy-girl groups, playing games such as tag and chase; in 5th and 6th grade children explore the outdoors in large groups with mixed male to female members in equal proportions. Aside from the importance of grouping, boys tended to engage themselves in unstructured physical activity, while girls enjoyed socializing while walking, skipping, or jumping (Holmes, 2012). Play in an unstructured natural environment gives the children a genuine understanding of reality and how they fit into the natural world (Fjørtoft, 2001). An investigative study of a kindergarten in Telemark County, Norway demonstrates how children favor natural, unstructured environments (Fjørtoft, 2001). In this particular study, children were in one of two groups. In the first group the surrounding area was all woodland vegetation and shrubs, which gave the children multiple choices of nature to play within. This group was compared to a structured playground setting where students had many rules that they were to follow. In the unstructured environment students played much more cooperatively and demonstrated improvement in motor ability (Fjørtoft, 2001). Ramstetter, Murray, & Garner (2011) state that unstructured play occurs with supervision, but without adult direction and leading, which ultimately leads to benefits for the children. Children at all age levels appreciate unstructured outdoor play because it is a time to socialize and explore without the structure typically found in classrooms (Holmes, 2012). Unstructured free play provides an integral educational opportunity for children in many areas of cognitive and social-emotional learning (Ramstetter, Murray, R, & Garner, 2010). Ryder (2007) explains, “play is an easy means of learning for young children as they are naturally drawn to it and want to get involved in it” (p. 93). Understanding and relating to the importance of play in the outside environment is important for child development, but the potential benefits in an

environment are not realized if children do not have the opportunity to access and utilize the features of the given environment (Sandseter, 2009).

Whole Child Development

The “whole child” is a term used to describe all aspects of child development such as cognitive, emotional, physical, and social (Ramstetter, Murray, & Garner, 2010). The benefits outdoor play offer for the whole child are essential because they give children the opportunity to develop movement, explore, think critically, and engage in unique activities with other peers (Ramstetter, Murray, & Garner, 2010). Outdoor play offers children opportunities to use their bodies in vigorous ways for long periods of time. By experiencing active outdoor play children develop health, strength, and coordination while enjoying themselves. (Richardson, 2007)

Physical activity and exposure to nature are important factors in healthy child development and provide mental health benefits (Charles, 2010). Along with the benefits of having healthier children, giving children the opportunity to run around outdoors, in open space, enhances motor skill development at all ages (Galizio, Stoll, & Hutchins, 2009). Aside from the importance of healthy children and increased motor development, socialization is a piece of the whole child approach. Giving children the much-needed opportunity to explore the outdoors encourages children to communicate, to express feelings, and discover the world around them with other peers (Olsen, Thompson, & Hudson, 2011). Outdoor play stretches the child’s imagination and increases challenges for children, providing opportunities for problem solving (Pica 2011).

Given access to a natural outdoor setting, children can engage in meaningful opportunities to cooperate, negotiate and collaborate with peers outside the classroom (Richardson, 2007).

Outdoor play is a natural part of a child’s life; outdoor play leads to positive stimulating cognitive development, creative imagination, and an outlet to let off every day stress. All parts

of play are critically important for children, but outdoor exposes children all aspects of whole child development (Clements, 2004).

The outdoor environment is not just a place for children to develop physically or socially but also to think outside the four classroom walls. Behaviors and relationships occur at different levels; play influences social and cognitive development through peer interactive strategies, problem solving and thinking critically with others (Barbour, 1999). The Father of Human Development theory, Erik Erikson, theorized that creativity and critical thinking begin with “natural genius of childhood and the spirit of place” (Louv, 2006 p.85). By providing early experiences with nature Williams (2008) explains, teachers purposefully support children’s development of scientific and aesthetic thinking so they can appreciate various dimensions of the world. Activities that take place in the outdoor environment give children hands on experience to develop dispositions for lifelong learning (Williams, 2008). In natural settings children engage in creative play involving trees, bushes, dams and many other parts of the natural environment. Gaining experiences outdoors gives students opportunities to better understand the world around them and is the importance of nature (Williams 2008). Time spent in these settings make it simple for students to foster rich fantasy play and inspire a relation to the outside world (Crain, 2005). According to Mainella, Agate, & Clark (2011) “through research on the brain as well in other developmental areas of study, play is needed in childhood; play acts as a forward feed mechanism into courageous, creative, rigorous thinking in adulthood” (p.95). Educators use the term “developmentally appropriate” continuously; play is in fact the most developmentally appropriate approach to learning because it lets children explore and examine their surroundings in their own way at their own pace (Mainella, Agate, & Clark, 2011). Richard Louv (2006) throughout his text *Last Child in the Woods* states, “Nature presents the young with

something so much greater than they are; it offers an environment where they can easily contemplate infinity and eternity” (p.97). Without outside experiences, infants are unable to differentiate themselves from the dominant caretaker and surrounding world; babies are shaped naturally through social learning that occurs in the outside world (Chawla, 1988).

Unseen Benefits

The outdoors is an extremely significant and different environment that can extend and compliment the indoor environment (Richardson, 2007). Children, as they grow, need space and that is exactly what the outdoor environment gives them. Letting children explore surrounding areas and not be closed in by four walls gives various perspectives of nature, animals, and even other human beings (Fjørtoft, 2001). Indoors there are barriers, artificial lights and sounds; outdoors there are major differences such as temperature, light effects, sounds, and air movement that offer children a different mental and emotional space (Richardson, 2007). Aside from the space granted by an outdoor environment children are free to do various activities that are prohibited indoors such as riding bikes, running, jumping, making messes, mixing resources etc. (Ramstetter, Murray, & Garner, 2010). It is in the outdoors that children can practice important skills such as ball-handling skills like throwing, catching, and striking. Aside from just ball-handling skills children can perform other skills such as pushing a swing, pulling a wagon or lifting and carrying moveable objects. Children learn by doing, an the appropriate outdoor area for play is necessary to learn. (Pica, 2013) Natural play is a powerful model for young children because it builds character confidence in the early years (Waters, 2007). When children are outside in the natural world, they begin to explore with initiative and set challenging goals for themselves. These life skills cannot be taught in the classroom (Waters, 2007). By having this freedom children are connecting to the natural world around them they can learn by touching the

dirt, watching various animals, smelling the flowers and many more outdoor activities that could potentially take place (Louv, 2006).

Legislative Mandates versus Outdoor Play

There have been many changes occurring in education that have altered the landscape of elementary schools across the nation (Henley, McBride, Milligan, & Nichols, 2007). The most common misconception associated with outdoor play is the idea that when children are outside running around, playing with one another, jumping, skipping, and screaming that they are just out there releasing energy and not learning (Maynard & Waters, 2007). Many schools have recently adopted the idea that recess is a waste of time and would be better spent in the classroom on academics (Henley, McBride, Milligan, & Nichols, 2007). School districts have changed standards and policies and have put a much higher emphasis on high-stakes testing which is to blame from dwindling outdoor play time. Many districts do not have enough time in a day to allow outdoor play because of the rigorous standards and curricula (Little & Wyver, 2008). This trend concerns many parents and teachers who feel outdoor play is an important part of the school day. Many parents, teachers, and administrators see no learning during outdoor playtime; in reality however, outdoor time is when the most learning occurs, especially for children eight years old and younger (Waters 2007). Outdoor time allows students to exercise, explore and get out built up energy from the school day (Henley, McBride, Milligan, & Nichols, 2007). After much legislative change in education, various programs that were removed from the school are making a slow return back, however hands-on nature play is not (Louv, 2006). A major barrier that schools face is the thought that activities spent outdoors playing and exploring will undermine academic learning. In reality, making time for outdoor play does not reduce academic learning but increases it (Henley, McBride, Milligan, & Nichols, 2007). Physical

education is mandated in schools and outdoor unstructured play is just as important and beneficial as physical education (Lee, 2007). Hanvey (2010) explains that even though outdoor play has no specific direction and is not structured like “indoor” classroom learning, children learn through play and it is an extension of indoor classroom standards addressed naturally by the outdoor environment. In 2008, when legislative decisions were being made and standards were changing American schools were faced with financial cuts. Since these drastic changes in the education system schools have seen a twenty-eight percent decrease in recess and a thirty-five percent decrease in overall physical education or activity (Mainella, Agate, & Clark, 2011). A survey performed by Duffrin (2005) in the Chicago, Illinois area revealed that fewer than one in five schools, a low eighteen percent provided daily scheduled outside time for all children, and only sixteen percent, provided any recess at all throughout the school day. This trend is affecting school districts all over the country because people do not understand the full benefits of children being active and exploring the outdoor environment (Henley, McBride, Milligan, & Nichols, 2007).

Play Deprivation

Play deprivation, or lack of play, begins with children unable to choose free and spontaneous outdoor play (Mainella, Agate, & Clark, 2011). The lack of nature in children’s lives has had a negative impact and has been named “nature deficit disorder (Louv, 2006). These negative impacts are described as behavior problems stemming from parental fears of the outdoors, restricted access to natural areas, and the lure of the screen (Louv, 2006). The enjoyment of outdoor play is changing due to a lifestyle shift; children are extremely dependent on technology and find activities that involve the great outdoors to be dull or uneventful (Clements, 2004). Play deprivation from the outdoor environment begins with a rise of modern technology

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(Mainella, Agate, and Clark, 2011). Children spend more time engaging in TV, video games, and other electronic media and far less time being physical in the outdoor environment (Fjørtoft, 2001). The rise of electronic media in homes has provided alternate forms of play that are easily accessible and involve very little effort (Mainella, Agate, & Clark, 2011). As electronics and other types of media take the place of outdoor physical play there are many consequences that follow. These consequences can eventually lead to health problems because fitness levels are declining and waistbands are expanding in young children (Mainella, Agate, & Clark, 2011). Not only is modern technology an extremely important factor contributing to play deprivation, but also the risks associated with outdoor play can make adults unsure about letting children play in the great outdoors.

As years progressed and risks associated with outdoor play became greater parents became concerned about what could possibly happen in the outdoor environment. A recent survey study of eight hundred thirty mothers found only thirty-one percent of parents allow their children to play outside because of the fear associated with the outdoor environment (Mainella, Agate, & Clark, 2011). Factors such as parental concerns about neighborhood safety, availability of friends to play with, and access to interesting play areas nearby homes are important influences on whether or not children are able to play outdoors (Veitch, Salmon, & Ball, K. 2010). The biggest fear associated with outdoor play, whether it is in the backyard of a home or the backyard of a school, is the growing issue of “stranger danger” (Dowdell, Gray, & Malone, 2011). Stranger danger is a term used to describe the danger associated with adults whom children do not know (Sandseter, 2009).

Aside from the risk of stranger danger, the risk of playing outdoors and getting hurt is an issue that many parents struggle with as well. Little and Wyver (2008) explain that increased

injury through the use of playground equipment and nature itself turns people away from understanding the benefits of the outdoor environment. Chawla (1988) explains that parents have concerns over the fear of the natural environment; men or fathers have a greater knowledge of outdoor play, whereas women or mothers have a greater concern with nature play due to the potential of children being harmed. Although being active outdoors gives children freedom to explore and embrace nature, along with this freedom can come physical harm; the outdoors is an open space for children and because of this safety is often an issue (Little and Wyver, 2008). In many childcare and educational settings (i.e. school, day care, or home) generally, children outnumber adults, which leads to parent apprehension due to the difficulties of supervision in the outdoor environment (Kern & Wakeford, 2007).

The research provided ranges from 2001-2013, which is twelve years of extensive research on the benefits of outdoor play and exploration. A common wish, stated throughout the research, was that children should be free to explore and be children in the outside environment. The best unstructured outdoor play environments are designed to allow children to explore, follow their curiosity, and express their physical being and body movement; although this may not seem like the “typical” idea of learning, play is the most influential part of learning for young children to develop (Olson, Thompson, & Hudson, 2011). Children who are given the chance to be themselves and explore outdoors will look forward to creating and tackling increasing challenges. Adults who enrich children’s outdoor experiences offer new opportunities for children to express themselves creatively, stretch their imagination and thinking, and enjoy challenges (Pica, 2011).

Methodology

After much consideration, a qualitative study was performed based around the research question. In order to fully obtain the best results for this study, a survey consisting of five predetermined questions was dispersed. The survey information was not limited to the five questions; all other information the subjects provided was taken into consideration. The study took place at a rural elementary school. This school is an extremely small school with a fairly diverse background of students, especially in the socioeconomic aspect of life. Having attended elementary school in this district, and years later returning as a substitute teacher, I have grown to develop trusting relationships with many of the staff members, which is why they were chosen to participate in the study. For the process of this research, all elementary teachers in the district were invited to participate in the survey.

Experts agree that outdoor play is important in the development of children of all ages, but is often looked at negatively (Louv, 2006). How do elementary teachers feel about the developmental benefits of outdoor play during the school day? This study determined the benefits of outdoor play that elementary teachers believe to be critical to development during the school day.

Developmental benefits were identified in terms of unstructured outdoor play that promotes well-being and wholesome physical, social, and emotional development. Children are drawn to active outdoor play; the world outside allows children to explore their environment, develop muscle strength and coordination and gain self-confidence. Active play outdoors increases flexibility, fine and gross motor skills, creativity and many more aspects of development for a child's mind to grow. These developmental benefits are not only important in

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everyday life but also during instructional times in school because it allows children to freely use their mind and investigate the world around them (Little & Wyver, 2008).

To determine the impact of outdoor play and whether the benefits outweigh the risks, a survey was administered to local elementary school teachers. The survey was available only through an external link to an electronic survey post Survey Monkey, which is an online, web-based survey program that generates and reports the findings directly to the principal investigator. The survey asked the respondent to explain the impact of outdoor play on learning, in short answer format (A copy of the survey is attached in the Appendix B).

The principal at the school distributed the Survey Monkey URL via email to all the teachers in the building (Pre-kindergarten through 5th grade). The participants had access to the URL on Survey Monkey from February 24 through March 17, 2014. The five survey questions that were asked were researcher-generated, focusing solely on opinions about outdoor play in relation to development of the students in grades pre-kindergarten through fifth. Twenty elementary teachers were invited to participate in the survey. Out of the twenty invited participants only ten responded to the survey; 50% participation was granted to this research. Once all surveys were completed from all willing participants, the analysis process began. The information obtained was analyzed using an open coding system. The system focused on the positive and negative information given from the subjects of the study. As the responses were analyzed more in depth, various themes were pulled from the participant responses and highlighted in different colors. When analyzing the participant's responses, weather factors contributing to outdoor play were highlighted in yellow, curriculum struggles and time-related factors were highlighted in pink, the overall developmental benefits of outdoor play were highlighted in blue, various behaviors that stemmed from outdoor play were circled in green,

using outdoor play as a reward system was highlighted in pink and outlined in yellow, and when unable to get outside, alternative forms of play were incorporated, this information was coded in yellow highlighter outlined by blue

As an aspiring elementary teacher, I understand the importance of obtaining information from teachers with whom a trusting relationship has already been established. I believe the questions were answered in a professional, honest manner and most of the participants gave additional information than what the question simply asked. The teachers that participated are tenured professionals that have been teaching for 6 or more years within the district; on average teachers that participated in this study have 18 years of experience behind them. The importance of this research was to provide other educators, administrators, and parents with a qualitative study focusing on teacher perceptions of the importance of childhood development in relation to outdoor play.

The rationale behind this study was an attempt to gather relevant information to close the existing gap that the research offers. After reading an abundant amount of research on the topic it is clear that many people such as, parents, educators, and even some teachers still believe that outdoor play is a waste of crucial academic time and interferes with the rigors of the new state standards. The goal of this study was to obtain information and opinions from experienced professionals on the issue of outdoor play and demonstrate the positives in relation to child development. Many people do not understand the importance of early childhood development in relation to play and especially in relation to outdoor play during the school day. The research in this qualitative study exhibits that teachers perceive outdoor play during the school day not as wasted time, but as a crucial part of healthy child development. The results obtained from the

survey demonstrated that 10 out of the 21 teachers that participated understand the importance of outdoor play in relation to development, thus proving the researcher hypothesis to be true.

The goal was of the study was met due to personal opinions that were given from experienced, passionate teachers. A qualitative approach for this study was beneficial because it allowed for great detail and provided a deep understanding about the topic. The importance of the study emerged solely from the participants' opinion.

Results

A deductive approach was taken in this qualitative study. The researcher was aware of probable participant responses to the survey questions. The findings showed that out of all participants that completed the survey the common trend was that outdoor play is invaluable to all aspects of child development. There were six common themes that were pulled from survey responses weather factors, curriculum/time struggles, developmental benefits, behaviors, rewards, and alternative forms of play. On average teachers take their students outside for unstructured play about 3 times per week however weather plays a big role in this. An overwhelming majority noted that students generally do not engage in unstructured outdoor play during the winter months due to cold temperatures and improper dress attire. Every participant with the exception of one stated that they go outside at least once a week, weather permitting.

The amount of time per week was low when participants explained that there is just not enough time in the day to go outdoors. The new curriculum and state standards are too rigorous to take any time away from the classroom. This was a common concern given by 50% of the participants. All participants, whether their students go outside daily or not at all, explained the importance and benefits that outdoor play has on development. All participants explained that children of all ages need time to explore and investigate their outdoor environments. By being outdoors and engaging in unstructured play children discover different ways of play, how to interact with peers, and how to problem solve. Socialization and the importance of large muscle movement was a common comment given by 100% of participants. Almost half of all participants explained that because outdoor play is unstructured and students have more freedom to make decisions on their own, they work through problems socially better in the outdoor environment than in the classroom environment.

Aside from the known benefits of unstructured outdoor play participants provided additional information about outdoor play. A common trend that was also discussed within the survey was that when students are given outdoor play time their behavior in the classroom is completely different. Out of the 10 teachers that replied to the survey 4 explained that when given as little as ten minutes of outdoor time students come back to the classroom willing and ready to learn. Many teacher participants believe when students are given the opportunity to let out steam, socialize, and use large muscles it helps their brain focus and be more attentive during academic periods. The research also demonstrates that when children are in a frustrated mood with the rigorous academics, when given the opportunity to explore the outside world the students come back to the classroom focused and with the frustrations alleviated.

Play is not only beneficial for development and behaviors but it can be used as a reward system to control classroom behaviors. Thirty percent of participants explained that outdoor play, is limited due to curriculum rigors, and is used as a reward system to give students something to strive for throughout the day. Students know that if they work hard throughout the day they will be able to earn outdoor time. Teachers explain that it does not matter if the child only earns five minutes of outdoor time; they complete their work and attend to lessons because they know they will eventually have the opportunity to get into the outdoor environments. It is difficult with the time consuming schedules and subjects to have additional time in the day for play but when the students are focused and on task lessons are taught quicker due to less interruptions.

Almost 100% of the teachers in the study had the same basic views about outdoor play and the importance behind it. The last theme that was pulled from the research was based around comments on alternative forms of play. Many teachers expressed how difficult it truly is to get

students outside during the 6-7 hours of the school day. Teachers explain that if, in some instances especially in the winter, students do not have the ability to get outdoors they will utilize the gym as a means of play. Even though an indoor gym is still housed between four walls, the students still focus and work on their gross motor skills, socialization, problem solving, and creative thinking skills. Having the students be active in any setting gets their energy out and gets their minds moving so when the students do head to the instruction filled classroom they are more attentive.

All participants in this study came to a common belief that any type of physical play whether it is in the outdoor environment or indoor environment is important as long as the students are exploring, moving, and interacting. The importance of outdoor play is that it gives students a chance to explore their environment, which is completely different than being enclosed in four walls, even if it is in a gym. Participants in this study all had the same comment somewhere in their responses, “any play is very important no matter the age.”

Discussion

The participants in this study added to the general research of outdoor play. All participants gave examples as to why outdoor play is so beneficial and how it can impact the learning of a child. All survey responses were given from teachers ranging from grades pre-k through fifth grade, which demonstrated that outdoor play is important to all students of all ages. The information obtained in this qualitative study provides more examples of the benefits of outdoor play however, as parents, administrators, and teachers we understand the benefits yet do not always see children have access to the outdoor environment during the school day. After the positive research collected in this study and the various studies discussed in the literature review, why is it that outdoor play still does not happen as often as it should?

A common theme that was expressed in the survey is that there “just is not enough time in the day.” With the new standards that New York State has put into place classroom education is much more rigorous than it has been in the past. Even though there have been drastic changes to standards and curriculum, outdoor play has been on a decline for many years (Henley, McBride, Milligan, & Nichols, 2007). Even after the positive research and the benefits that have been provided about outdoor play, teachers and parents still struggle to understand how crucial outdoor play is to child development.

A response to the survey was that one specific teacher took her students out 0 times per week, no matter the weather. Later, when asked the importance of play the teacher went on to discuss how invaluable play was to children of all ages; so one must question why that teacher does not allow his/her students to engage in outdoor play? This is a common struggle with teachers at all education levels; there is just no time in the day for outdoor play.

Developing social skills is a life skill that students must learn in order to be active citizens in the world (Fjørtoft, 2001). Social skill building begins in the very beginning of education and carries through into the later years of education (Galizio, Stoll, & Hutchins, 2009). If students are not given the opportunity to play in the outdoor environment and socialize in a way that is new and exciting to them they will struggle to have those specific skills needed for everyday life (Galizio, Stoll, & Hutchins, 2009).

Not only are social skills developed and learned through unstructured outdoor play, but also problem solving and critical thinking also occurs just as much, if not more, in the outdoor environment as in the classroom (Francis, Paige, & Lloyd, 2013). Various situations occur in the outside environment and children need to work together and problem solve these issues. Even though teachers are present in the outdoor environment there is less teacher involvement so students work through problems by using their words instead of running to the teacher to solve every small problem (Ramstetter, Murray, & Garner, 2011). Students are able to explore and imagine in the environment this gives them opportunities to think critically about how events happen such as weather, structures, plants, animals etc.

One obvious theme that occurred throughout the survey was the importance of physical development, especially in the early years. Teachers stressed the importance of running, jumping, hopping, skipping, all gross motor activity and how this activity gives students the balance and coordination needed to grow. Being active in the outdoor environment is not only beneficial for balance and coordination but it strengthens muscles and keeps students healthy (Richardson, 2007). Children that play freely in the outdoor environment get the exercise needed to keep their bodies in shape. Having the opportunity to grow, play, and learn in the outdoor environment will lead children to happy, healthy lives (Pica, 2013).

The qualitative study proved the researchers hypothesis; the benefits of outdoor play are extremely important in all aspects of child development. The research reviewed in the literature suggested that outdoor play had many positive aspects to child development however; outdoor play was still viewed as a waste of time. What the qualitative study demonstrated was that even though teachers strongly agree that outdoor play is extremely important to child development there is either not enough time in the curriculum and school day or it is too difficult and time consuming to take children out when the weather is not sunny and warm. The research granted by the participants in this study gave evidence to fill in the gap as to why, knowing the benefits, outdoor play is still so scarce in schools.

The benefits of the study were that all participants that responded to the study have had six or more years of teaching in the public school system. All teachers that responded to the survey have had various experiences teaching more than one grade level, which gave them more knowledge of the benefits of outdoor play, based on what the participants have observed. Out of the twenty-one participants asked to take part in the survey ten did respond which is a 50% participation rate. The study would have been more reliable if a bigger study population was used. With only using twenty potential participants and only have half of them respond the study was limited to a small number of responses. The benefits of using a larger study sample would have provided more research with various themes and possibly more explanations as to why outdoor play does not occur as often as it should during the school day.

Conclusion

This study has indicated the importance of outdoor play in relation to child development. Significant findings were provided from a local elementary school regarding the importance of outdoor play, but why it does not occur as often as it should during the school day. Given this study, further studies would be beneficial to research how schools are making up for the lack of outdoor play.

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Appendices

Appendix A Consent Form

April Powers is a student in the Curriculum and Instruction program at SUNY Fredonia. I am conducting a study to determine if the impacts of outdoor play benefit learning. One of the benefits of this study is that it will extend the knowledge base on teacher beliefs on outdoor play and whether or not outdoor play has benefits or not. In addition, study results will be discussed in the researcher's Master's thesis, which is a requirement of the Curriculum and Instruction degree program.

Participation in this survey is strictly voluntary. If you click the Survey Monkey URL at the bottom of the page you will be granting your consent to participate in the study. The survey should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. The survey asks you to identify the grade level you teach. You will be asked to respond to 5 items about the impact of outdoor play on student development.

All information collected will be kept confidential. No names will be requested on the survey. The survey program gathers all of the data and returns it to the researcher. I will have no way of knowing which teachers did or did not participate in the research. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Also, you are free to skip any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering. If you have any questions regarding this survey, please contact the researcher at powe0536@fredonia.edu (716) 969-1629. You may also contact SUNY Fredonia's Research Administrator Cathrine Kilpatrick at (716) 673-3528 (Cathrine.Kilpatrick@fredonia.edu) and/or my SUNY Fredonia faculty advisor Carrie Fitzgerald at (716) 673-4652 (Carrie.Fitzgerald@fredonia.edu) if you have questions or concerns about the study.

There are not any risks associated with this study and the survey items should not cause any distress or discomfort. The results of the study will be discussed in the researcher's Master's thesis, as partial fulfillment of the Curriculum and Instruction degree program at SUNY Fredonia.

I thank you for your time and participation in this study.

Sincerely,

April Powers

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/3RCWBVC>

Appendix B Survey Questions as included in Survey Monkey

1. What grade level do you teach?

- Pre-kindergarten
- Kindergarten
- 1st
- 2nd
- 3rd
- 4th
- 5th

2. How many times per week do your students go outside to engage in unstructured play during classroom time?

3. Do your students go outdoors during all seasons of the school year? Why or why not?

4. What are your views on the benefits of outdoor play in terms of development (physical, emotional, social, etc.) during the school day?

5. With the experience you have as a classroom teacher, can you provide an example of how outdoor play is beneficial for students based on your personal observation?

6. When the students do not have the opportunity to get outside during the school day, do you notice a difference in behavior or academic performance?