

Playing outdoor and its importance in the child's life; A Psycho-Social Prespective

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Abstract

Play is one of the integral part to human development as it contributes to every aspect of the well-being of children such as cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being. The modern technology and its inventions in current societies are affecting the childhood experience. Outdoor play habits are vanishing fast and more isolated, technological gaming and digital life is disconnecting children from natural world and its learnings. The outdoor play activities is defined as an open and constantly changing environment, where it is possible to experience freedom, gross and boisterous movements, and contact with natural elements. While playing outside, children benefit from being exposed to sunlight, natural elements, and open air, which contributes to bones development, stronger immune system and physical activity (Dyment, 2008; Bilton, 2010). The technology and its advancements had persuaded every field and it had deeply penetrated the child rearing practices also. No doubt, it had bought positive impact on quality of life but also it had huge impact on children and one of the key areas is the outdoor playing habits. Abundance of research has been done around outdoor play and the positive influence it is having on early childhood learning and development. During their growth, they develop their motor skills, and focus on their peers by engage more and more in play activities that expand their knowledge of the world around them. Many researchers concluded that maximum learning outcomes happen in the environment that allows them to explore, discover and play. Many researchers supported the importance of play in child's healthy development (Pellegrini., 2007, 1998; Ginsburg, 2007). The immense positive influence outdoor playing used to have on child, his round development is the core focus of this paper, and it will explore the researches and knowledge we are having regarding psychosocial developments and play.

Key words: *playing, outdoor, child, development, environment.*

Introduction

After an average nine month journey inside the womb we humans come to this world prepared and nature equip us with all the necessary potentials which we need all along the life. These nine months, which we spend in a womb, not only grow us physically but also it is the preparation for our social, cognitive and psychological aspects of development. The genetic materials we receive from our parents determines our basic individuality and nurture too plays its key role by shaping this genetic material and molding it in a way that is necessary for the survival of human organism. Most of the genetic information beneath need stimulation in order to express and evolve. Play is one of the mode that act as a stimulation in order to provide a learning environment for the expressions of genetic materials beneath and future nurture learnings.

An integral part of every child's life is Play which every child loves. It stimulate different aspects in child such as imagination, social integration, creativity, and various other such behaviors. Play can be defined as "a range of voluntary, intrinsically motivated activities that are normally associated with pleasure and enjoyment" (Catherine, 1990). It can be consider as a rehearsal for real life events which are about to come in future. Play is an important element of growing-up for children. It is an innate instinct, which is inherit in every child and is enjoyable by every child. It plays a crucial role in children's learning as well as developmental process. The process of play is universal and flexible and there is no ways of play as wrong or right. There seem less types of play among children's and it is interesting to note down the similarities of play all across globe in old traditional child plays which differ only by names. The types of plays can be active or subdued, imaginative or exploratory, alone or involve others. The American Academy of Pediatrics explains that childhood play is "essential for helping children reach important social, emotional, and cognitive developmental milestones as well as helping them manage stress and become resilient" (Ginsburg, 2007). According to the Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is not only a right for children to be engaged in play, but it is also a matter of equal opportunity for all children.

Outdoor Play

The outdoor play activities is defined as an open and constantly changing environment, where it is possible to experience freedom, gross and boisterous movements, and contact with natural elements. One of the key aspects that characterizes childhood is Outdoor play. The

exposure to the natural world through exploration, experimentation, motivation and manipulation of their senses is the important need of children's. Outdoor play provides variety of exposures to the natural world this opportunity helps them to develop and use their imagination and creativity. It also helps them and provide the opportunities of learning which in case of indoor classroom environment cannot provide. Outdoor play is not essential only for physical development of children has but also plays an essential role for cognitive health. Outdoor activities stimulates the physiological processes in the body such as stimulation of muscles through use of portable and stationary equipment's such as bat, balls, bicycles, etc. Most researchers including parents accepted the importance of outdoor play and its important role in children's healthy development (Clements, 2004). One of the first advocate and important pioneer was Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) who stressed on the importance of outdoor play in an early years setting (Riddall, 2002). According to him, the play in open field is important and has a pivotal role in developing children's imagination, which is connected with the healthy growth and successful learning. The outdoor play provide unique opportunities such as open access to space, weather, fresh air, stimulation to senses as well as muscles, social interaction and various such kind of opportunities to the children's (White, 2014).

Outdoor Play and its Psychosocial Perspective

Nature provides enormous opportunities for children to develop their cognitive skills and it provide an impetus to their inborn curiosity. Many developmentalists try to establish a substantial relationship between nature and cognitive development of child (Kuo, 1998; Wells, 2000). Children's whose houses are surrounded by greenery and provided more greenness had the highest levels of cognitive functioning was found in one of the longitudinal study (Wells, 2000). Another research compared two group of children's one who lived in urban settings and another in villages where houses surrounded with green environment. The research found that children's surrounded with green environment had more chances for outdoor play and evaluated that green environment plays an important role in social and cognitive development of the children (Taylor, 1998). In another research, the researcher evaluated that the experiences at early age with nature could provide important and significant role in cognitive development of child (Kahn, 1999). A study found also that a simple passive interaction with green environment plays a significant role in

increasing relaxation, reducing stress and improve cognitive functions (Bailie, 2012; Kaplan, 1973).

Researches agreed that nature and nurture based interaction activities helps in developing attention skills in children's (Cimprich, 1990; Faber, 2001; Hartig, 1991; Grahn,1997; Wells, 2000). A cross sectional study compared children from two groups in Sweden. The children's who attended preschool based on nature where students had free access to nature and emphases is more on outdoor activities regardless of weather conditions. Second group consists of urban school children where they play in manmade playground is not in much contact with nature. They found and concluded that children in first group who plays in natural environment develop better motor coordination skills and are having higher attention and concentration abilities (Grahn,1997). Therefore, the researches suggests that through the interaction between nature and nurture based activities help children to develop attention functioning abilities and other various cognitive skills.

At the early age through play, children interact with their immediate environment and with play; they interact with peers and adults. Through this interaction with different contenders, they develop social skills by unstructured or structured activities of play (Brown, 2009). The social relationships they learn and develop during these activities provide them many benefits such as caring, controlling, and regulating emotions with peers (Cohen, 2001). Such kind of positive social interactions and role playing activities cultivate prosocial behavior among children and with the help of peers and teachers, they learn to share and cooperate with each other that plays a pivotal role for cultivation of prosocial behavior (Spivak, 2011). During the period of preschool stage children shows advances in social-emotional competence (Coplan, 2009). They tend to shows decrease in egocentric behavior and shows understanding of others by behavior such as sharing, helping and other various prosocial behaviors with their peers (Eisenberg, 2006). In early childhood, play activities and such social interactions with the peers provide the platform for children to develop, strengthen, practice prosocial behavior (Acar, 2012). In addition to prosocial behavior, children develop cognitive skills by playing in natural environment and they learn and engage with their world (Milteer, 2011).

There are five stages in emotional maturation in children was revealed by David Krathwohl et al (Kellert, 2005). One among these five stages is valuing and the explained valuing as the ability or attribute importance or worth to ideas, situation or information reflecting a clear and consistent

set of preferences and commitments” (Kellert, 2005). Therefore, according to this statement, the development of child's knowledge regarding nature and others develops through interaction of child with nature and development of prosocial behavior towards nature takes place (Thompson, 2008). Through pretend play and other nature-based activities, children develop prosocial behavior towards peers (Acar, 2012). A study concluded that witnessing a creature either animal or plant being damaged may be the reason of getting fostered motivation to protect and take care of nature and also develop empathy towards nature (Cheng, 2012). Another study found that children scored higher on a measure of empathy who had close relationship and strong attachment to their pets than who had weak relationship to their pets (Poresky, 1990). This research also concluded that children might learn empathy from animals by staying connected with them in nature-based activities. In addition, researchers suggest that caring about nature and commitment to protect it may increase by having experience with nature (Schultz, 2002). Natural settings also provide an important opportunity for children in terms of use of spaces (Coley, 1997). Natural environment help children to develop and promote social interactions and therefore children in urban cities may not have informal social interactions due to lack of natural settings but on the another hand children living in natural and greener settings have constant touch with nature and have frequent and free social interactions (Louv, 2008; Kellert, 2005). In nutshell, outdoor activities in natural settings provide abundant opportunities for children to develop social and prosocial behaviors towards nature and peers.

Children scaffold their early knowledge as they begin to question and explore their environment. They develop new concept of learning by restructuring early knowledge or by gaining new knowledge. Through interaction, nature provides huge opportunities to learn new concepts and learnings by direct activities or teacher directed activities. For example, children in North America learns to understand practical things by observing and interacting with nature in natural settings such as butterflies fly in the day and moths at night, observe and identifying living organisms and their living feature. Children's curiosity and exploratory play enhance their causality development (Schulz, 2007). In addition, this kind of exploratory play helps children to develop exploratory inquiry skills. In such kind of exploratory natural environment they have opportunity to develop scientific temper of inquiry skills such as questioning about difference between humans and animals, relation of humans with nature and understanding of natural phenomenon, there cause and effect relationships.

During outdoor play, children should have the opportunity to experiment moments of failure and success, learning by trial and error. If we try to prevent all risky situations, children will not know how to deal with unpredictable environments and will lack the necessary confidence to overcome challenges in an autonomous way. The environment created outside can offer interesting conditions for children and adults to show different aspects of their personality, which normally do not emerge during the time indoors. Outdoor play allows for a deeper knowledge about children, facilitating a more adequate educational intervention from the adult (Maynard, 2013). Likewise, less conflict occur during outdoor play and children tend to cooperate more with each other (McClain, 2015). The characteristics of the space (open and unpredictable) enable the development of joint goals between children, leading to experiences of companionship among peers. During outdoor play, children become teachers and learners, sharing their knowledge and skills to accomplish different tasks or challenges. In this process of cooperation, it is possible to develop empathy, as children begin to understand other's people feelings and needs. The crucial difference about socialization in the outdoor environment is that opportunities for interaction happen in a gradual way, giving children the possibility to choose the moments to connect with others or to play individually, without having to continually run into each other as it so often happens in close and exiguous rooms.

Conclusion

Changes in current societies are affecting childhood experiences. Time for outdoor play is diminishing, contributing to sedentary lifestyles and disconnected from the natural world. The outdoor environment offers unique stimulus that capture children's attention and interest. Natural stuff like the one sticks, rocks, flowers, soil, water, etc., are explored with curiosity and drive to learn, as they offer countless possibilities for play. Natural elements are open-ended materials, that can respond to children's imagination and needs (White, 2008).

The need to guarantee that children have the possibility to play outside, facing adventures and challenges, without being constantly engaged in activities controlled by adults is a recent concern for most western societies. We have evolved to a more modern, technological, and globalized world but, in the process, we lost habits and experiences that influence our quality of life. One of the major challenges of present and future generations may be the need to find a balance between an increasingly “busy” society and the preservation of experiences of well-being

and connection to the world. The educational settings have an important role in this process, guarantying that during the first years of life children have the means and opportunities to develop a positive self-esteem, curiosity and motivation about learning and good socialization skills. The quality experienced in education services may help the child to overcome vulnerabilities related to other contexts (e.g. poverty, low levels of parents' education). Opportunities to contact with Nature, deal with risks, and socialize with peers and adults in a responsive and caring environment will contribute to quality educational experiences, influencing children's motivation and enthusiasm about learning and school.

The valorization of early years and outdoor play can be understood as a mean to promote healthier lifestyles, acknowledging that today's children will be the adults of tomorrow. Parents, educators, and policy makers should work to promote better childhood experiences, guarantying that children's interests are considered in urban and school planning as well as at home. Without ignoring the slow rhythm of practices transformation, it is important to instigate educational settings to promote outdoor play, considering the amount of time that children spent in school and the impact of those experiences for learning and development.

With these ideas in mind, this testimony aims to highlight the importance of outdoor play in natural environments for children's learning and development and to inspire and challenge others to take advantage of the opportunities that the outdoor environment can offer.

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