

What's Happening 'Out There'?: A Look into Nature Based Play in Alberta Out-of-School Programs



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Issue:



- Play and nature are critical to children's development
- Research has shown that children's free play in nature is declining
- Collaborative approaches are needed to find solutions

Partnership



What is happening in
Alberta out-of-school
programs for nature play?



Defining **NATURE** Play

FREE PLAY IS:

- Freely Chosen
- Personally directed
- Intrinsically motivated
- **Occurs in natural environments**



- Bob Hughes (2012)

How is **NATURE PLAY** interpreted in Alberta?

- Broad definitions that include:
 - activities that are done outside or with natural equipment but are not necessarily in highly natural areas;
 - structured activities that are done in and with nature;
 - and activities that included youth and adults.
- More conventional definitions describe play in natural areas created for and by children, but do not necessarily name it “nature play”.



you could just do your own thing

we probably did things that we
shouldn't have done

a magical place where they're
completely absorbed

loved to be outside

they'll play for hours if you let them.

pick up that rock and there's a bunch of bugs under it

amazement and wonder

you're touching and you're smelling, and you're tasting

we'd each have one as our house

peace and restfulness

Theme 1

Desire

“What do you say to a parent? They’re a tax payer, so you can’t be like, well he can stay here, but he’s only allowed to be on the computer for half an hour, when the parent’s not too worried about it either.”

“Most of these programs that the kids are getting are very structured. They have a very specific end goal that they’re looking for and society is sort of driving this achievement focus.”



“I think partly what dictates the response of the parent is the response of the child.”

Theme 2

Scarcity



“We have an outdoor courtyard here that has grass but no trees or anything like that”

If you look at the world from the scale of a child, you don't need a lot of natural space....You need three trees and some dirt and some rocks. You need a puddle that shows up on a field every time it rains....Sometimes you've got to reduce your scale a little bit to find them.”



Theme 3

Comfort in Nature

“I’ve really learned that you just have to learn alongside the children and be a researcher with them, and if they ask you questions like what is this, and you don’t know, then you can say I’m not sure but let’s look it up.”



“We let the child, for the most part, come to it on their own.... There’s never any push from us to have to do an activity so we just let them do what they feel comfortable doing.”

Theme 4

Risk Aversion



“We tend to do the indoor snowball game where we have these bundles of socks and play indoor snowball games to actually play it where you have the right conditions and where you don’t want people getting hurt.”

Activity Break!



The Land

“A documentary film about the nature of play, risk and hazard set in The Land, a Welsh adventure playground.”

[The Land](#)



**PAVEMENT
ENDS**

**FUN
BEGINS**



Where would you choose to play?



RISK

Inherent and Integral to Nature Play

Risky play may be understood as
children's play that suggests....

High Speeds

Great Heights

Harmful Tools

Rough and Tumble

Dangerous elements

Getting Lost

....with some level of intent to feel fear
and joy at the same time

(Sandseter & Kennair, 2011)

Many ways to use the playground slide!



Risk and Hazard



Risk assessment, judgment and capacity can only be developed by engaging with real challenges.





In Nature Play kids need to:

- Perceive potential risk
- Encounter risk
- Manage risk



Benefits of Risk in Play

- Physical activity benefits
- Learn to respect the elements
- Stress management opportunities
- Aid in types of problem solving
- Social skills gained (relationships)
- Develop resiliency and self-regulation
- Awareness of personal health and safety
- Gain experience for adulthood

Group discussion Topics

**TREE
CLIMBING**

**ROUGH &
TUMBLE**

STICKS

WATER

FIRE

What are some possible solutions to keep children safe, yet allow challenge, risk and adventure? How do you manage risk in this environment?

Risk-benefit assessment means considering two goals alongside each other:

- The goal of protecting children from avoidable serious harm.
- The goal of providing them with stimulating adventurous play opportunities.





Resources



National Guidelines

Nature Play & Learning Places

Creating and managing places where children engage with nature

ROBIN C. MOORE



The Play Return:

A review of the wider impact of play initiatives

Tim Gill

Independent researcher, writer and consultant



July 2014

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Websites

- Children in Nature Network: <http://www.childrenandnature.org/>
- Child & Nature Alliance of Canada: <http://childnature.ca>
- Project Wild Thing: <http://projectwildthing.com>
- 50 things to do before you're 11 $\frac{3}{4}$:
<https://www.50things.org.uk>
- Forest Schools Canada:
[http://www.forestschoollcanada.ca/home/about- forest-school/canadian-programs](http://www.forestschoollcanada.ca/home/about-forest-school/canadian-programs)
- The Nature Kids Institute:
<http://www.naturekidsinstitute.org/NKI/Home.html>
- Down to Earth: www.downtoearthproject.org.uk
- Nature Detectives: <http://www.naturedetectives.org.uk>

Articles

- “HUMMINGBIRD PARENTS”: Seven Actions Parents Can Take To Reduce Risk And Still Get Their Kids Outside blog.childrenandnature.org/2014/03/10/seven-actions-parents-can-take-to-increase-outdoor-safety
- Natural Childhood: <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/document-1355766991839/>
- Risk and Reward in Nature Play: <http://www.ecology.com/2012/07/17/risk-reward-nature-play/>
- The Overprotected Kid: <http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/03/hey-parents-leave-those-kids-alone/358631/>
- School Ditches rules and loses bullies (New Zealand) <http://tvnz.co.nz/national-news/school-ditches-rules-and-loses-bullies-5807957>
- Is this the perfect playground, full of junk? – The Guardian http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/may/10/perfect-childrens-playground-the-land-plas-madoc-wales?CMP=tw_t_gu
- When we stop children taking risks do we stunt their emotional growth? <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/features/when-we-stop-children-taking-risks-do-we-stunt-their-emotional-growth-9422057.html>

Children in Nature Newsletter



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International Play Association Conference 2017

Calgary, AB



Promoting the Child's Right to Play

National Child Day 2014 :

It's Our Right to Play!

IT'S OUR RIGHT TO PLAY.



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Alberta's National Child Day Website. At the top, two children are peeking over a white banner. Below the banner is a navigation bar with a search box and social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The main content area features a large image of a boy in a yellow shirt with his arms raised, a central text box titled 'WHAT IS NATIONAL CHILD DAY?' with a scroll bar, and a collage of photos and a heart icon on the right. The footer contains copyright information and links to Home, Privacy Policy, Terms and Conditions, Site Map, and Contact Us.

NATIONAL CHILD DAY

SEARCH

HOME PHOTO GALLERY GET INVOLVED RESOURCES COMMUNITY CALENDAR CONTACT US

WHAT IS NATIONAL CHILD DAY?

Welcome to **Alberta's National Child Day Website**. While the resources and information on this site could be used in any town or city in Canada, the community calendar is specific to Alberta. We encourage parents, professionals and front-line service providers (including teachers, nurses, social workers, therapists ...anyone working with children) to browse this site and look for ways to celebrate our most precious resource, our children.

On November 20th, Canada and countries around the world celebrate National Child Day as a reminder of our shared commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The CRC is the most comprehensive treaty in support of children. It is signed and ratified by more nations than any other human rights document in history, attesting to its global significance and the underlying universal values it upholds.

National Child Day is celebrated annually to mark two historic events: the 1959 signing of the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child and the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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