

Vicki L. Ehlers, CFLE

Engaging Outdoor Opportunities for Infants and Toddlers

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Resources

Cultivating Outdoor Classrooms: Designing and Implementing Child-Centered Learning Environments by Eric M. Nelson, (2012), Redleaf Press, www.redleafpress.org

Natural Playscapes: Creating Outdoor Play Environments for the Soul by Rusty Keeler, (2008), Exchange Press, www.childcareexchange.com

Learning with Nature Idea Book: Creating Nurturing Outdoor Spaces for Children by The National Arbor Day Foundation and Dimensions Educational Research Foundation, (2007), National Arbor Day Foundation, natureexplore.org

“Supporting Whole-Child Learning in Nature-Filled Outdoor Classrooms”, S, Wirth and N. Rosenow, Young Children, January 2012.

The Hope Connection, TCU Institute of Child Development, www.child.tcu.edu

The Great Outdoors: Advocating for Natural Spaces for Young Children, Revised Edition by Mary K. Rivkin with Deborah Schein, (2014), National Association for the Education of Young Children, www.naeyc.org

www.natureexplore.org

www.csefel.org

www.sensory-processing-disorder.com

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Outdoor Areas for Infants, Toddlers, and Caregivers

Visibility, ease of maintenance, durability, pleasurable visual and tactile elements, cultural significance, and meeting regulatory standards are overarching criteria for the design and implementation of outdoor playscapes. The space should be pleasing and comfortable for young children and adults. Thoughtfully and intentionally designed outdoor areas nurture young children's skills and development while offering a space for all to enjoy!

Ares for Consideration

Entry Feature

Climbing/Crawling

Building

Art

Messy Materials

Music and Movement

Garden

Pathways

Gathering

Digging

Water feature

Wheeled-toy

Swings/Rockers

Storage/Shelving

Adapted from Learning with Nature Idea Book: Creating Nurturing Outdoor Spaces for Children

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Proprioceptive and Vestibular Experiences

Young children crave physical activity that gives resistive input through whole body actions and hand actions. “**Heavy work**” helps young children develop an awareness of their position in space in relation to objects and people, plan their movements, and regulate their level of arousal.

Proprioceptive information is gained through the skin, muscles, and joints. The vestibular system gives children information about the sense of motion and balance. Information from the vestibular system combined with information gained from proprioceptive helps young children learn to balance and move. Planning rich outdoor play experiences for movement opportunities helps young children learn to regulate their movements and energy levels.

Proprioceptive Experiences

Experience	Example
Carrying or Lifting	Buckets Water hose Watering can Stacking/Moving objects
Pushing or Pulling	Wheeled toys Sweeping Wagon Baskets Raking Climbing up
Jumping or Bouncing	Bouncy ball Mattress Dance Low tree cookies or stumps
Climbing or Hanging	Trees Rocks Nets Pull-up bars
Running or Crawling	Varied surfaces
Fine Motor for Upper Extremities	Painting Squeegee Washing
Resistive	Spray bottles Sponges Clay/Sand Sidewalk chalk Pounding

Vestibular Experiences

Experience	Example
Balancing	Balance beams Sit on soft ball Unstable surface: air mattress, sand
Swinging	Tire swing Rope swing Hammocks
Rocking	Rocking chair Rocking horse Rocking boat
Bouncing	Hippety hop ball Mattress Adult knee
Stretching	Climbing ladder Dance Catching/throwing ball
Rotary Movement	Spinning Rolling down berm Sit n’Spin Roll across varied surfaces
Music and Creative Movement	Dance with scarves Movement to music Pretend to move like an animal

Adapted from Attachment: Understanding the Roots of Behavior session notes, Barbara Sorrels

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Planning Outdoor Experiences for Infants and Toddlers

When planning outdoor experiences for infants and toddlers:

1. Start with a movement concept (ex: *crawling*)
2. Vary the basic concepts (ex: *hands & knees, forward, low height, curved path*)
3. Vary the surface concepts (ex: *on a grassy surface*)

Movement Concepts and Vocabulary					
Locomotor Skills		Nonlocomotor Skills		Manipulative Skills	
Crawl		Bend and stretch		Toss	
Climb		Twist and Turn		Catch	
Walk		Push and pull		Kick	
Run		Swing and rock		Strike	
Jump		Fall and rise		Swim	
Gallop					
Basic Concepts and Vocabulary					
Body Awareness		Spatial Awareness		Spatial Relationships	
Head Neck		Direction		Up/Down	
Shoulder Arm		Forward		Inside/Outside	
Chest Trunk		Backward		Near/Far	
Elbow Wrist		Sideward		Over/Under	
Finger Leg		Level		Around/Through	
Knee Ankle		Low			
Foot Toe		High			
Back Hip		Size			
Face Eye		Big			
Ear Nose		Little			
Mouth Forehead		Shape			
		Wide			
		Narrow			
		Path			
		Straight			
		Curved			
		Zig Zag			
Surface Concepts and Vocabulary					
Types			Textures		
Grass	Wood	Rock	Prickly	Smooth	Rough
Cement	Sand	Mud	Wet	Dry	Dusty
Dirt	Pebbles	Chips	Grainy	Squishy	Hard
			Soft	Spongy	Crunchy

Adapted from: *The Dynamic Self: Activities to Enhance Infant Development* by Rebecca Anne Bailey and Elsie Carter Burton, C.V. Mosby, St. Louis, Mo., 1982

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Outdoor Playspace Design Elements

Six Contrasts in Outdoor Environments

Child care design expert, Anita Rui Olds, shares six contrasts in nature. These contrasts can provide guidance in creating nurturing outdoor playscapes.

CONTRAST	EXAMPLES
In/Out	Windows Fences Porches
Up/Down	Steps Berms Ramps Lofts
Light/Dark	Lattices Screens Shadows Awnings
Exposed/Tempered	Wet & Dry Windblown & Empty Porch Shrubs Shade
Something/Nothing	Wall & Window Cluttered & Empty Window Seats Arches
Order/Mystery	Predictability & Surprise Winding Paths Place for Discovery Partially concealed entrance

Nine ingredients for Nurturing Outdoor Environments

Early care and learning expert, Barbara Sorrels, has identified nine essential ingredients for creating nurturing environments.

1. Communication of Value and Preciousness
2. Felt Safety
3. Playful Environment
4. Nurturing Touch
5. Accidental Touch
6. Gross Motor Activity
7. Sensory Rich Environment
8. Practicing Shabbat (rituals for rest and respite)
9. Facilitating Self Awareness and Emotional Regulation