

IC - (20964) - PLAYING IN 'THE BACKYARD': ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURES AND CONDITIONS OF A NATURAL PLAYSPACE WHICH SUPPORT DIVERSE OUTDOOR PLAY TYPES

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Background and objectives

Engagement in play has been definitively linked to the healthy development of children across physical, social, cognitive, and emotional domains. The enriched nature of high-quality outdoor play environments can afford a greater diversity of opportunities for play than indoor settings. To more effectively design natural playspaces, we must better understand how the physical environment supports, or hinders, the different types of play which suit children's needs and interests. This study seeks to identify environmental features and conditions which support specific outdoor play types by examining children's play patterns before and after an extensive renovation of 'The Backyard', a nature play and learning space at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History.

Process and methods (for empirical research)

An extensive behavior mapping protocol was carried out in the nature playspace over 7 days pre-renovation and again several months after its completion. Outdoor play types were recorded using the Tool for Observing Play Outdoors (TOPO; Loebach & Cox, 2020) for more than 800 individual play events at both time 1 and Time 2; additional play and environmental data were recorded for each play event including physical activity levels, peer interactions and loose parts engagement.

Main results (or main arguments in the case of critical reviews)

In this presentation, findings from quantitative and spatial analyses will highlight the environmental features and interactions found to support each of the TOPO's eight primary outdoor play types: physical play, exploratory play, imaginative play, play with rules, bio play, expressive play, restorative play and digital play. Patterns in each outdoor play type by age group will also be presented, highlighting play environment features which support play for diverse ages.

Implications for research and practice/policy | Importance and originality of the contribution

Findings will not only highlight the value and efficacy of the TOPO for capturing outdoor play type patterns, but will provide insights on specific outdoor play environment features which afford high-quality play interactions for diverse child users and interests.

Palavras-chave : outdoor play, natural playspaces, outdoor playspaces, environmental affordances, play types