Playing Out: Connecting Children with Nature through Play
You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than a year of conversation

- Plato (427-347 BCE)
The Greeks

...the need for a Healthy Mind in a Healthy Body

Children’s play directed toward their education...

Intellectual - Practical - Moral

Physiological benefits of Play

Boy playing Knucklebones 420 B.C.

Girls Playing Piggyback 300 B.C.

Kite flying, young girl, 4th c. BC
17th Century
John Locke (1632 – 1704)

Toys help children learn through play

- Found Objects from Environment & Man Made
The importance of play, freedom and experimentation

Children learn from their surroundings

First-hand experiences

18th Century
Rousseau (1712 – 1778)

Trial and Error

18th Century
Rousseau (1712 – 1778)
Friedrich Frobel (1782 – 1852)

Importance of “Free Play”
Non-Prescriptive Play Materials

Kindergarten
Young Children’s Garden

[Images showing outdoor and indoor play areas with various play materials and setups.]
The Ambiguity of Play

Bob Hughes

Play is important to our existence – it is the behavioral and psychic equivalent to Oxygen.

Play: How it Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination and Invigorates the Soul

Stuart Brown

Play Naturally

Stuart Lester and Martin Maudsley
“Give children a chance to love the earth before we ask them to save it.”

—Sobel

“Imagine a world in which all children grow up with a deep understanding of the life around them.”

—Louv: 2005
The Nature Aspect
Being Alive

Playful Encounters with Bodies, Materials, Space and Time
What is Play?

- Freely Chosen
- Personally Directed
- Intrinsically Motivated

Children and young people determine and control the content and intent of
What is Play?

Play has been linked to:
- Social Development
- Language Learning
- Problem Solving
- Creativity
Animal Play
Play Across Disciplines

Psychological Approaches
- Developmental Psychology
- Ecological Psychology
- Social Psychology
- Evolutionary Psychology
Recognizing that play operates on a mind embodied and embedded in the world...

There are mutual, reciprocal and intimately entwined feedback loops among and between these levels of organization.
The Value of Play

- Social interaction
- Physical activity
- Intellectual stimulation
- Creative achievement
- Emotional stability
Compound Flexibility
Compound Flexibility

the ideal developmental cycle

degree of flexibility in a child’s world

directly affects the relationship between the child and his/her environment

contributes to the level of flexibility in the developing child - shown through the ability to solve problems

influences opportunities for experimentation, control, etc., by the child

these are linked to the range of positive feelings experienced:
- pleasure, success, achievement, etc.

governs development of:
- self confidence
- self awareness
- self acceptance
Brain, Body and Environment Interconnection

Unique characteristics of Play:
- Unpredictability
- Novelty
- Flexibility
- Imagination

Through play, children have the ability to thrive and shape their world.

(Lester and Russell, 2008)
The 3 F’s

- Fun
- Freedom
- Flexibility
Natural Environments

Support a Wide Range Of Play:

- Develops A Sense of Place and Attachment
- Offers Possibilities for Construction: Risk Taking & Object Manipulation
- Stimulates Creativity - creates a Sense of Wonder

Natural Environments
Natural Environments

Children can access their sense of self and their interdependence and connectedness to the natural world.
Nature Play

- Sense of self
- Encourages creative thinking
- Promotes Health and Active Lifestyle
- Sense of Wonder
- Motivational
- Sensory development

Unstructured and Centered

- Explore
- Attentive
- Experiment
- Discovery
- Balance
- Create

Child
Why we support Play at the NC Zoo
The Conservation Connection

Goals for kidZone:

- Connect children with nature
- Our Vision: Children who appreciate and enjoy nature
- Model "doable" play for individual families (accessible loose parts, simple designs)
- Our Mission: To provide outdoor, affordance-rich areas for children to engage in all types of play
- Provide ideas for play in nature (building forts, digging in the dirt)
- Provide opportunities for increase physical activity
- Build on family relations
- Support emotional and social processes
Playworkers follow a set of Playwork Principles that establish the professional and ethical framework for playwork. These principles describe what is unique about play and playwork, and provide the playwork perspective for working with children and young people.
Imaginations at Play
Opportunities for Risk Taking
Opportunities for Construction
Tools for Play
A Playful Nature: Being Open to moments of silliness and Fun!

A playful teacher creates a ‘what if’ environment open to endless potential

- Power(2011)
Tools for Play

Affordance

- All action possibilities
- Large or small space
- Diverse or sterile
- Relevant to the individual
Tools for Play

Loose Parts
- Manipulatable
- Natural or manmade
- Trash or treasure
Opportunities for Risk Taking
Approaches to Intervening in Children’s Play

Dynamic Risk Assessment
Planning for Play

- Allow for play
- Protect play environment
- Offer/ Vary loose parts
- Practice active awareness: “how are they using this space?” “What can I do to enrich their experience?”
- Incorporate a balance
Community Involvement
Training
Research
Play is the highest expression of human development in childhood, for it alone is the free expression of what is in a child’s soul.

Friedrich Froebel, 1782-1852