



What Do We Do Outside?: An Introduction for Educators to Teaching Outdoors

August 18th, 2020

Plan for the Session

Who's Here?

Theory – Why Outdoors? Why Now?

Practice:

Model 1: Bringing the Classroom Outdoors

- How do I schedule my day?
- What do I need / what do children need?
- Logistics

Model 2: Using the Environment as the Third Teacher

Resources for Teachers and Families

Wrap-Up

Who am I?

Sasha Kopp

Community Early Childhood and
Family Engagement Consultant at
the Jewish Early Childhood Project

- Denmark
- Temple Beth Shalom in Needham



What is our connection to the outdoors?

What is your favorite activity to do outside?

How do the activities WE love use our senses?

How can we help children have similar experiences in school?

“Nature inspires creativity in a child by demanding visualization and the full use of the senses. ... In nature, a child finds freedom, fantasy, and privacy: a place distant from the adult world, a separate peace.”

— Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder*, Algonquin Books, 2008, p. 7

Why Outdoors – Why Now?

- There is more space
- More air-circulation
- Children can socially distance if need be
- Can use surfaces that don't hold COVID-19 as well as plastic
- Lowers anxiety
- Creates a sense of freedom and joy
- It is good for children and teachers for countless reasons!



Why Outdoors – Why Now?

In America: What Does The Research Say?

Children who play outside are more physically active, more creative in their play, less aggressive and show better concentration. (*Burdette and Whitaker, 2005; Ginsburg et al., 2007*)

Sixty minutes of daily unstructured free play is essential to children's physical and mental health. (*American Academy of Pediatrics, 2008*)

In a typical week, only 6% of children ages 9-13 play outside on their own. (*Children & Nature Network, 2008*)

The most direct route to caring for the environment as an adult is participating in "wild nature activities" before the age of 11. (*Wells and Lekies, 2006*)

<https://www.nwf.org/What-We-Do/Kids-and-Nature/Why-Get-Kids-Outside.aspx>
National Wildlife Fund



Why Outdoors – Skills for all children!

- Independence
- Creativity
- Appreciation of Nature
- Open ended play
- Self-guided learning**
- Group Learning
- Curiosity
- Exploration
- Independence
- Teamwork
- Small Group Play
- Parallel Play**
- Imagination
- Flexibility

- Science
- Responsibility**
- Focus
- Problem Solving
- Gross Motor Skills
- Fine Motor Skills
- Balance
- Coordination
- Understanding/ Appreciation the Seasons
- Appreciating Change
- Risk Taking
- Trust
- Love**

What do we have to think about to make Outdoor Play happen?

- What is our environment?
- What are our goals?
- What are children actively learning?
- How do we communicate learning to administration and the parent community?



What does Outdoor Play look like?



Model One:
Bring the Indoors Outdoors



Model 2:
Use the Environment as Third Teacher

You don't have to pick just one! Plus - remember that this is the year to keep trying new things!!

Bringing the Classroom Outside!

Two Things to Keep in Mind:

1. Anything you do inside you can do outside
 2. There is no such thing as bad weather - just bad clothing!
- Doing School outdoors can look many different ways
 - Be creative with your spaces:
 - Beautiful lawn space
 - Parking lots
 - Nearby parks
 - That random strip of grass next to your building
 - Under an awning
 - Tents
 - It is ok to change it throughout the year depending on the needs of your class.

This is a year of experimentation!



Creating a Physical Space Outside!

How do you designate space outside?

Space per class

- Tent
- Tarp
- Fenced/ Roped off area
- Rope on the ground
- Rug (Polypropylene rugs seem to be popular)

Space per activity

- Tarp / Parachute
- Tables
- Use chalk or parking spaces in parking lot

Space per child

- SitSpots
- Squared off individual space



Things to Keep In Mind....

- Make sure to get tents that are sturdy
 - Weights on the legs or poles in the ground
 - Some tents have optional walls for wind
- If you use a tent you don't have to use it every day
- Tarps work great to keep space designated for everyday use
- You can use tarps or tables for small group play
 - You can set limits for how many children at tarp/table
 - You communicate the limit to children by using rocks with that number on it or that number of dots



Creating Routine

Outdoor learning still needs structure – for you and the children

Create a schedule:

- How do you set the tone for the day?
- Where is snack incorporated?
- How do you use transitions for cleaning?
- Is play teacher-centered or child-centered?
- Ensure that children are still able to have unstructured playground time.
- How do you reflect on your day every day, and plan for the next?

Mock schedule

8:30-9:00 - Open Play / Arrival
9:00-9:30 - Circle Time
9:30-10:00 - Choice One
10:00 – 10:20-Snack / Story / Cleaning
10:20-10:50 – Choice two
10:50-11:30- Playground time
11:30-12:00 - Special (music /yoga)
12:00-12:30 - Lunch
12:30 -1:00 - Open Play

Circle Time

- Use designated spots for sitting
- Greeting Song
 - Can you do a handshake, chant or use instruments in new ways to avoid singing?
- Attendance
 - What does it mean to not have a wall?
 - Rocks in a basket for attendance
- Weather
- Emergent Curriculum
- Jewish Curriculum
- Do you need a microphone?



Art

Art can happen outside in many different ways!

- You can use more space to create larger, and perhaps messier, outdoor art projects.
 - Small Group Projects vs Individual Projects
- Sometimes they allow children to stand, use big motions and also cross their mid-line while they are painting.
- Connect art to nature:
 - Use natural objects as paint brushes or print making.
- Children also like to draw what they notice outside.
 - Clipboards are magical for observational drawing.



Art

Things to Notice

- There's a supply table
- Kids are painting in different positions:
 - Easel
 - On a wall
 - On the ground
 - Individual tray
- Smocks
- Sink
- Chalk
- Drying Rack
 - You could put rocks on paintings in parking lots / on grass (collecting rocks!)
- There is no one way



Mud Kitchen

- Open-ended exploration for dramatic play
- Fosters curiosity, exploration and experimentation
- Mathematical opportunities:
 - Measuring, filling and emptying and exploring capacity
- Endless imaginative and role play possibilities
- Language development:
 - Descriptive words, scientific questioning and exploration, and storytelling through role play
- Rich and genuine messy, sensory experiences
- Fine motor skills development through use of real tools in play situations



Mud Kitchen



Mud Kitchen



Natural Objects as Loose Parts

Open Ended Materials

- Can play independently or with groups – trays!
- You can provide materials or have children find their own
 - Scavenger hunt / nature walk
 - Could have kids collect from home as well
- Loose part play engages many learners – builders and creators
- Inspires imagination
- Children can explore process without product
- You can mix natural and synthetic objects
- Keep loose parts on hand – have baskets accessible
 - Rocks/leaves/twigs/pinecones/ acorns
 - They can be used as objects in dramatic play, accessories for block building and anything that children imagine.
 - You can never have too many!



<https://happyhooligans.ca/nature-faces/>

Topics for STEAM Learning Outside

Topics

- Seasons
- Leaves
- Sticks/ Rocks/Dirt
- Weather / Sky/ Clouds / Sun
- Growing
- Animals and Ecosystem
- Worms/Dirt
- Compost
- Water/ Ice Exploration
- Bubbles
- Rain / Rainbow



Skills

Measuring
Patterns
Balance/ Physics
Melting/ Freezing
Color Mixing
Shapes
Magnetic properties
Experimenting
Trying and Repeating
Collaborating

Leaves as STEAM Learning Outside

- Sensory exploration
- Sorting leaves by shape or color
- How many leaves long is each child – measure then graph it
- How many cheerios/pompoms/beads can fit on each leaf?
- Learn parts of the tree/leaf
- Leaf rubbings
- Leaf / nature collages (with glue)
- Ephemeral art with natural objects (no glue – just arrangements)
 - Create a book with the photos
- Nature Inspired self-portraits
- Find a tree to follow each week or two – how does it change?
Why does it change?
- Explore the rhythm of the seasons and how that affects your school and neighborhood.



Gardening

- Sensory Experience
- Comfort with dirt, bugs and new experiences
- Language development
- Fine motor – real tools (shovels)
- Fosters Curiosity / Wonder/ Questions about the word
- Explore change/ growth over time
- Understand culture surrounding where food comes from.
- Being able to fully see a process through
- Ownership over foods/product (do they try more?)
- Sense of responsibility
- Sense of disappointment
- Understanding of seasons + impact on growth
- Working towards something that impacts school and community.



Gross Motor Games

- Freeze Dance / Dance party with outdoor speaker
- Red Light - Green Light
- Yoga – (trace the shadow! – see picture)
- Movement Games – (Follow the Leader)
- Movement Songs (Animal Action etc.)
- Parachute Games (then clean!)
- Hopscotch
- Tape Jumping Challenges:
 - How far can you jump?
- Obstacle courses:
 - Practice skills such as hoping, skipping, galloping, crabwalk etc.



Block Building / Gross Motor

Block Play!!

- Outdoor blocks are heavy, and some are most easily moved using teamwork and cooperation.
- Large blocks help foster social dynamics and problem solving skills as children work together to accomplish their goals.
- Through incorporating block play outdoors, children are able to create any sort of dramatic play area they imagine.
- Additionally, blocks foster physical strength, flexible thinking, language development, social skills and problem solving skills.



Loose Parts for Gross Motor Development

Other ways to incorporate Gross Motor Exploration

- Tires
- Stumps
- Hills / Uneven ground
- Thick Rope (ask Ronnie)

- These all provide physical challenges for children leading to gross motor development.
- They are all open ended inspiring endless creative play.
- Heavy objects – such as tires, might require two children to move reinforcing social skills and problem solving.
- Also walking on uneven ground/stumps helps brain development as we have to more consciously think of our foot placement each step we take.



Loose Parts for Gross Motor Development



Creating Open Ended Environments



Music



Specials

Specials : Music, Yoga, Movement, STEM, Etc.

- First and foremost, check with your school administration and local regulating bodies because specialists often go from room to room.
- For all specialists, make sure that students are far enough away from instructor. (have a protocol in your school and contact local authorities to define “far enough”)
- Help students find their own space:
 - SitSpots
 - Parking Spaces
 - Chalk
 - Hula Hoops
- Use Technology:
 - Microphones/ sound systems
 - Outdoor screens to Zoom – can be down under an awning



Logistics

- Outdoor Storage – (Look for patio furniture sales)
Milk crates are great.
Kids can have their own w/ supplies
- Individual Class Space vs. Shared Space
- Transporting / Shelving – Do you need carts/wagons, collapsible wagons exist!?
- Snack
- Backpacks – Do you need them this year?
- Lunchboxes – Tell families to bring ice packs
- Cubies – Could you transition to folders?
- Sinks
- Bathrooming / Diapers
 - How close are you to your building?
 - What would be your plan inside – how does being outside change it?
- Know your regulations



Weather

Warm Weather:

- Sunscreen / bug spray - get waivers if need be
- Water access
- Hats
- Shade
- Play with ice and water as much as possible

Rain:

- Rain Suit/ Rain Pants
- Activities that use water – watercolors
- Clean toys with soap and water
- Covered Space if needed
- Thunder/Lightning Plan
- Extra Clothing

Cold

- Lots of Layers/ Extra Clothing
- Hoods with necks or neckwarmers
- Warm fabrics, hats, waterproof gloves etc.
- Make sure activities are glove-friendly
- Hot chocolate 😊

Any other weather tips?
Add it to the chat!!



Model 2 Inspirations– Forest Kindergartens

- Scandinavian model
- Particularly during COVID-19 schools are transitioning as they are noticing the safety and health benefits of spending more time outside
- The Danish model is rooted in the belief that, “the good childhood” includes children actively exploring, taking risks and navigating social dynamics independently.
- In this model, children spend 5-10 hours outside each day.
- Some schools have some indoor home base but the majority of meals and activities are all outside except for in extreme weather.



Other Models– Forest Kindergartens



Other Models– Forest Kindergartens



Other Models– Forest Kindergartens



My Experience Taking Children Outside - Boston

“But...There are no toys here!”

- This shows that the child doesn't know what to do.
- Create structure to your time outside. Take time each day to share different ways to explore outside and take time at the end of each day to reflect on play. Through exposure, children will discover ways to play without toys 😊
- Make sure to have snacks and making sure children are dressed appropriately.
- Remember it's ok for children to be bored sometimes. There is value in children figuring out on their own, how they want to spend their time.
- Continue to give children opportunities to spend unstructured time outside. Start with 30 min and gradually increase it.



The log in the woods....

What do you notice?

- Balancing
- Confidence
- Imagination
- Joy
- Independence
- Clear goals
- Clear growth



Navigating Risks

Physical Risks:

- Using their Bodies in new ways
 - Climbing, balancing and uneven ground
- Supervision and Independence
- Giving Children Space and Freedom

Social Risk:

- Social Dynamics
- Conflicts
- Different kinds of play is allowed
- Rough play
- When does the educator step in and step back

Emotional Risk:

- Children navigating their own feelings
- Self-Soothing
- Finding role amongst peers
- How do we give children the tools to practice self-advocacy?



Navigating Risk— Safety

- What makes something safe?
- Who decides what risks are acceptable?
- What is the benefit of risk?
- What is the consequence of risk?
- What can we do to help create an environment of safe risks?
- How do we communicate our values to our community?



Empowering Children

- More freedom gives children the time to navigate social situations independently
- Children have more opportunity to be intrinsically motivated when they are not seeking adult approval.
- Natural materials can be anything and inspire open ended play!
- Give children the gift of time...



What Do We Do in the Snow?

- Create an internal policy (either by school or by class about snow and cold)
- Communicate clearly to parents when you will/won't be outside.
- Have kids dress warmly.
- Explore moving snow, climbing on snow, dramatic play in snow, snow art/painting etc.
- Use shovels of different sizes ask families if they have spare snow accessories to share
- Remember children often love snow and look at us as models of whether or now it's "too cold"
- Make sure that **YOU** dress warmly and enjoy the snow too!



Other Models– Junkyard Kindergarten

“The concept of making a junkyard an integral part of each gan (kindergarten) was first developed in our kibbutz, Sdeh Eliyahu. I started collecting junk items for children's outdoor play when I first began working with the first-born children of the kibbutz. We had no funds then--or now--for elaborate play structures and I thought the items I collected could help play and learning coexist.”

In these spaces, children build and play with pipes, old pieces of fabric, large wooden spools, metal drums, and machinery parts – materials that have belonged to adults but are given new meaning through the innate creativity of children.

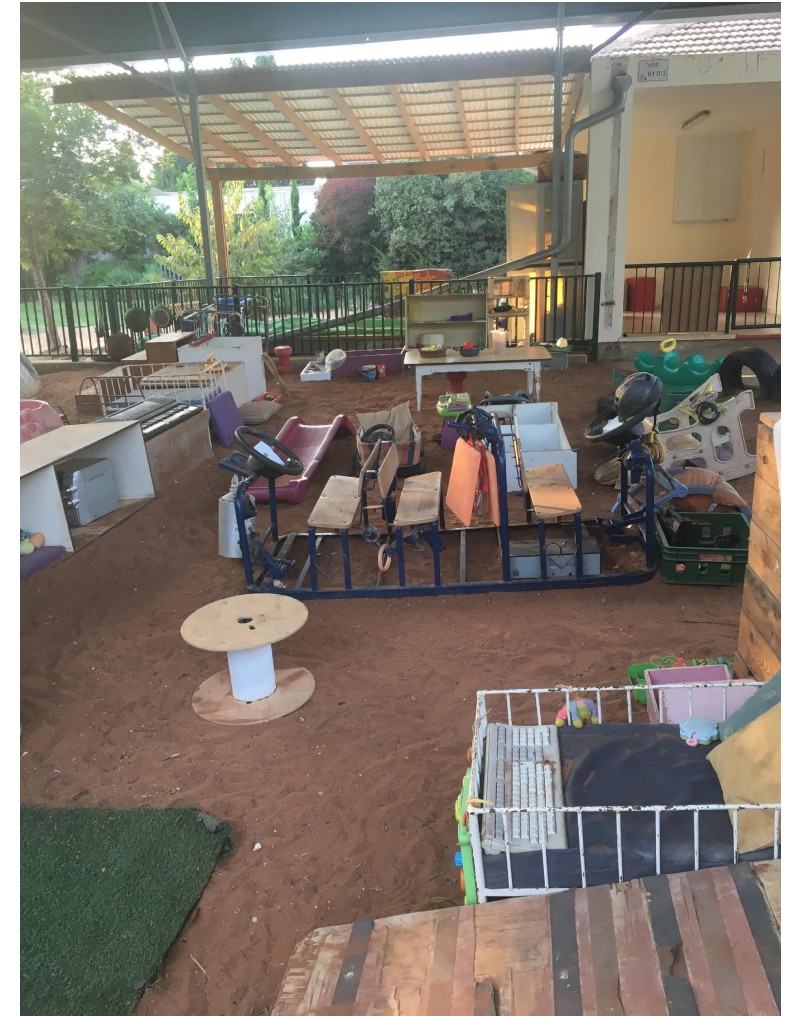
Invite teachers to take boxes, chairs, blankets, or other items from their house and use it in an unusual way outside. Tell them they are playing the Israeli way!



<https://www.questia.com/library/journal/1G1-18880112/children-in-the-junkyard>

<https://www.jewishedproject.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/Connecting%20to%20Israel%20through%20Junkyard%20Playgrounds.pdf>

Other Models– Junkyard Kindergarten



Communication with Parents

- Parents should have a clear understanding of how you are spending time outside – Do you need a Parent Handbook or Addendum?
- Share with them benefits of outdoor learning
 - Articles on the next slide :)
- Children should be sent in clothing for outdoor learning
 - Comfortable
 - Weather Appropriate
 - Extra Clothing / Layers
 - Rain Gear
- Share stories of children learning and growing in this new environment.
- Share your own excitement about this new model with parents!



Resources

The Outdoor Classroom Project Recommended Readings: <https://outdoorclassroomproject.org/resources/recommended-readings/>

NAEYC: Articles for Families on Nature and the Outdoors:
<https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/nature-and-outdoors>

Child Mind Institute: Why Kids Need to Spend Time in Nature
<https://childmind.org/article/why-kids-need-to-spend-time-in-nature/>

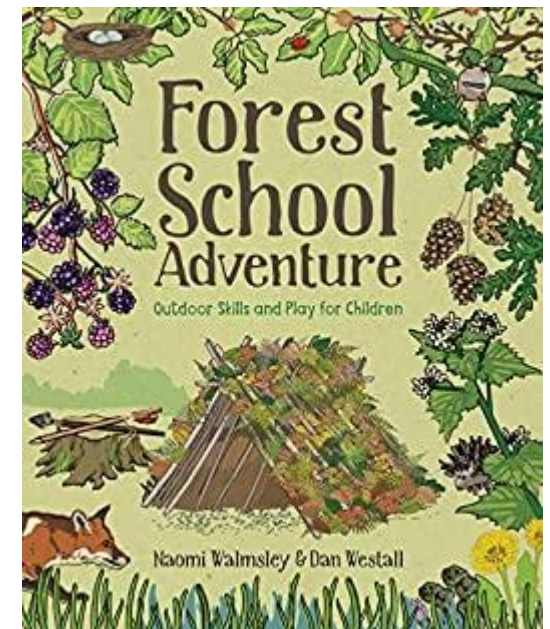
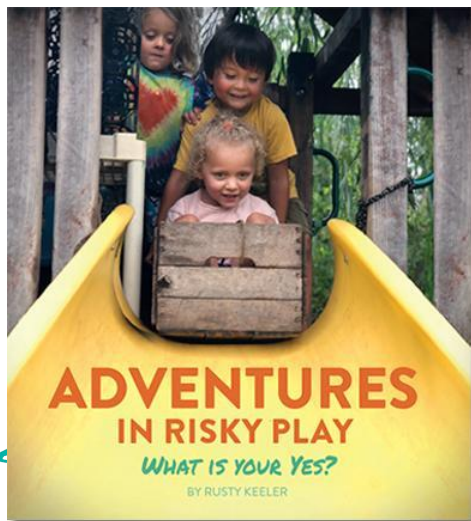
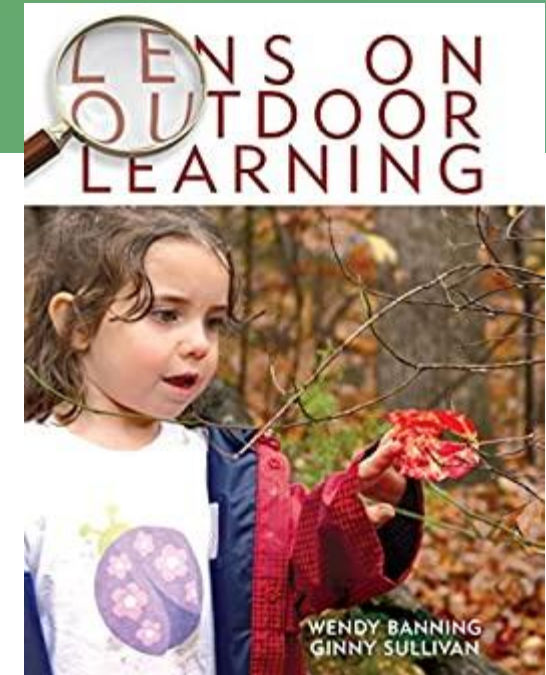
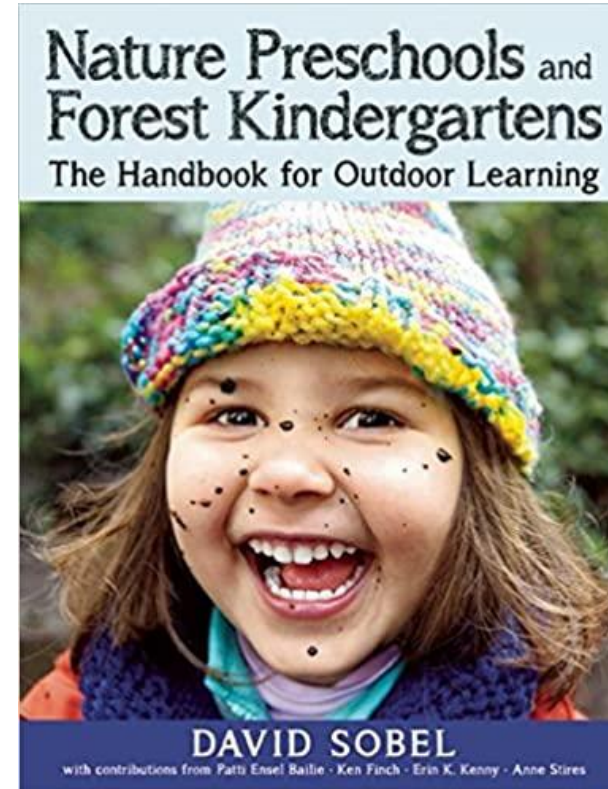
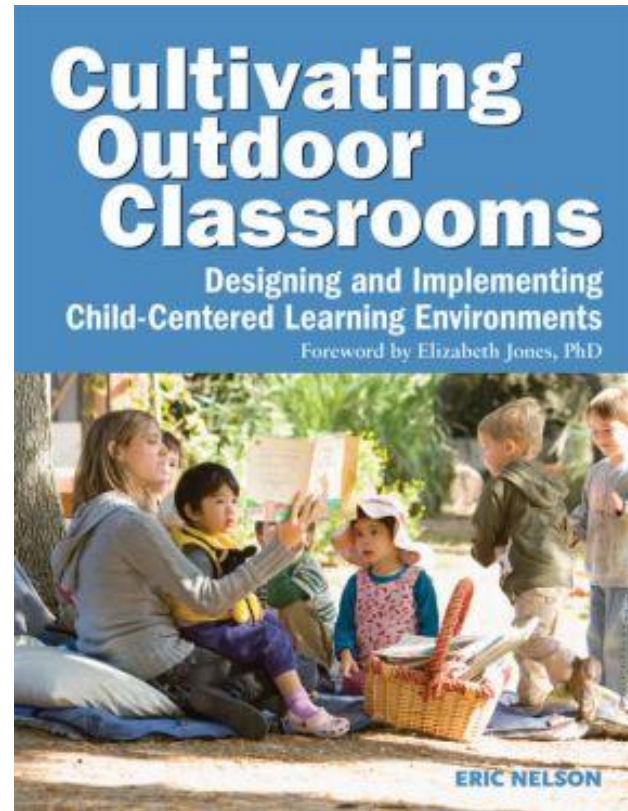
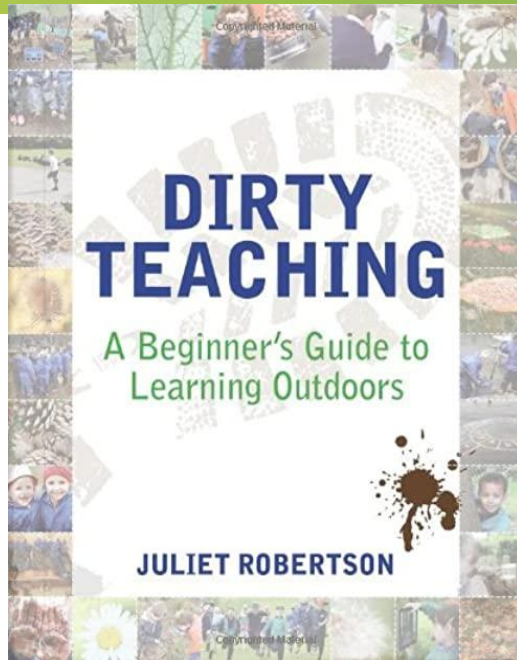
Harvard Medical School: 6 reasons Children Need to Play Outside
<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/6-reasons-children-need-to-play-outside-2018052213880>

School's Out Film
<http://schoolsoutfilm.com/>

Risky Play: Why Children Love and Need It- By Peter Gray
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/freedom-learn/201404/risky-play-why-children-love-it-and-need-it>

Consultants:
Shariee Calderone Private Consultant on Outdoor Learning: scalderone1027@gmail.com
Stephanie Rose at STEM Inquiry: srose@steminquiry.com

Resources: Books



<https://www.childcareexchange.com/catalog/product/adventures-in-risky-play/3600579/>

Use coupon code *RISKYPLAY* to get this new title for 15% off!

Questions?

Before you go: What's one new thing you might want to try outside this fall!?



@Jewishedproject_Ece



THANK YOU

Questions or want to learn more?
Contact me at skopp@jewishedproject.org



@Jewishedproject_Ece

