



Abstract Title: Early childhood education: Need for collaborative outdoor play learning strategies

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Introduction

Awareness of gaps in outdoor play and learning training in early childhood education has been elevated as a result of current outdoor play-based intervention studies in early childhood programs. Research indicates higher levels of early childhood educator training are associated with higher levels of PA [1]. Therefore, developing early childhood educator training to support the pedagogical skills and knowledge necessary to support outdoor play and learning is essential. The growing interest in promoting active outdoor play in the early years goes beyond the early childhood sector; opportunities for collaborative initiatives across early childhood and health sectors should be explored.

Objectives

To 1. describe the early childhood education outdoor play and learning gap; 2. highlight potential outdoor play and learning topics for early years and health sectors to include within future outdoor play and learning training.

Methods

The Go NAP SACC [2] self-assessment instrument was used to collect baseline data from 16 early childhood centres/directors on outdoor play and learning practices. Items related to outdoor playtime, activities, space, portable equipment, education and professional development, and policy, are presented using descriptive statistics.

Results

Comparison of baseline results to Go NAP SACC best practice recommendations [2] indicate variations in practices regarding activities, space, and equipment. Only one (6%) of 16 centres met the provision of outdoor playtime recommendation of three times per day or more, and 9 (56%) met the > 90 minutes per day recommendation. Responses show most centres fall short of recommended education and professional development and program policy on outdoor play and learning: only 2 (12.5%) of

centres reported professional development on outdoor play and learning > two times a year.

Conclusion

The gap in professional development training for early childhood educators working in these centres is compounded when research on early childhood educator preservice training involving outdoor play and learning is also examined [3]. The recently released Canadian 24-hour movement guidelines for the early years, and reviews into the health benefits of physical activity (and outdoor play) in the early years, along with evidence of the early years environment in influencing young children's PA behaviour, demonstrate the importance of supporting educators' professional development in active outdoor play [4, 5]. Early childhood educator training and development can follow suit through collaborative initiatives to develop training strategies that will impact the active outdoor play of young children.

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Cite this document in APA:

Turner, J.C., Cawley, J., Richard, B., & Kirk, S. (2018, September). *Early childhood education: Need for collaborative outdoor play learning strategies*. Paper presented at the Healthy Living, Healthy Life: Collaborative Health Conference on Research, Practice and Community Innovations Conference, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS. Retrieved from <https://ojs.library.dal.ca/HLHL/>

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