
VISUAL OBSERVATION AND ANALYSIS OF CHILDREN'S INTERACTION WITH THE OUTDOORS

OWEN PENTON-VOAK BMPE5005

SCHOOL A AGE GROUP: 4-5

Observation Context

- **Setting:**
 - Uneven grass ground with trees dotted around.
 - Pathways grooved into the ground, creating natural routes.
 - A fire pit in the center, surrounded by wood stumps as seating.
- **Left Side of the Area:**
 - Sandpit and children's natural kitchen for imaginative play with natural materials.
- **Right Side of the Area:**
 - Flatter ground with a large tarp covering the grass for art activities.

Key Observations

- **Fire Lighting Activity:**
 - Teacher demonstrated how to safely light a fire in the fire pit.
 - Children drew a representation of a fire on paper using natural materials like mud, sticks, and spices.
- **Sand Play:**
 - Children used pots and pans to play with sand, creating shapes and sculptures.
- **Imprinting Art:**
 - Children used leaves and other natural materials to create textured imprints on paper.
- **Crown Making:**
 - Children gathered natural materials from the ground and used glue to stick them to crowns they could wear.

IMPACT ON DEVELOPMENT

Physical Development

- Encouraged gross motor skills by interacting with the uneven terrain, trees, and stumps, promoting balance, coordination, and strength.
- Fine motor skills developed through sand play, manipulating pots, pans, and objects to create shapes and sculptures.

Cognitive Development

- Critical thinking and problem-solving were promoted through drawing a fire with natural materials, connecting abstract concepts with tangible experiences.
- Spatial awareness and attention to detail developed through the imprinting art activity, where children explored textures, patterns, and shapes.

Creative Development

- Imagination and artistic expression fostered through crown making with natural materials, allowing children to personalize their crowns.
- Creative exploration in the imprinting activity as children experimented with different textures and shapes using leaves and other found materials.

Social and Emotional Development

- Social interaction and cooperation encouraged as children worked together, shared materials, and communicated ideas.
- The calming outdoor environment promoted emotional well-being, helping children feel relaxed and confident during their creative activities.

SCHOOL B AGE GROUP: 3-4

Key Observations

- **Free Play:** Children were allowed to explore the space and engage with any equipment independently.
- **Swinging:**
 - Swung on swings beneath the tree platform.
 - Twisted the swing ropes to make the swing spin rapidly on their own.
- **Slide Play:**
 - Used the slide independently, climbing the dirt hill to reach the top and sliding down by themselves.
- **Climbing and Running:**
 - Climbing logs and tree stumps.
 - Running around the area and interacting with other children.
- **Adult Interaction:**
 - Children interacted with the adults supervising the area but played mostly without direct involvement from them.

Observation Context

- **Setting:**
 - Small walkway leading to the main outdoor area.
 - Canopy of trees covering the sky, providing shade and a peaceful atmosphere.
 - Features include logs, tree stumps, and a slide on top of a dirt hill.
 - A large tree with a walkway leading to an ascending path up to a platform built into the tree branches.
 - Sandpit inside a tractor tire located beneath the tree.
- **Age Group:** 3 to 4 years old.
- **Children's Freedom:** Children were allowed to roam and play freely with the equipment and facilities in the outdoor area.

IMPACT ON DEVELOPMENT

Physical Development

Gross Motor Skills:

- Swinging, climbing, and running helped develop **balance, coordination, and strength**.
- Climbing the dirt hill and logs enhanced **muscle strength** and coordination.

Fine Motor Skills:

- Gripping ropes on swings and climbing structures developed **fine motor skills** and **hand-eye coordination**.

Cognitive Development

Independence and Problem-Solving:

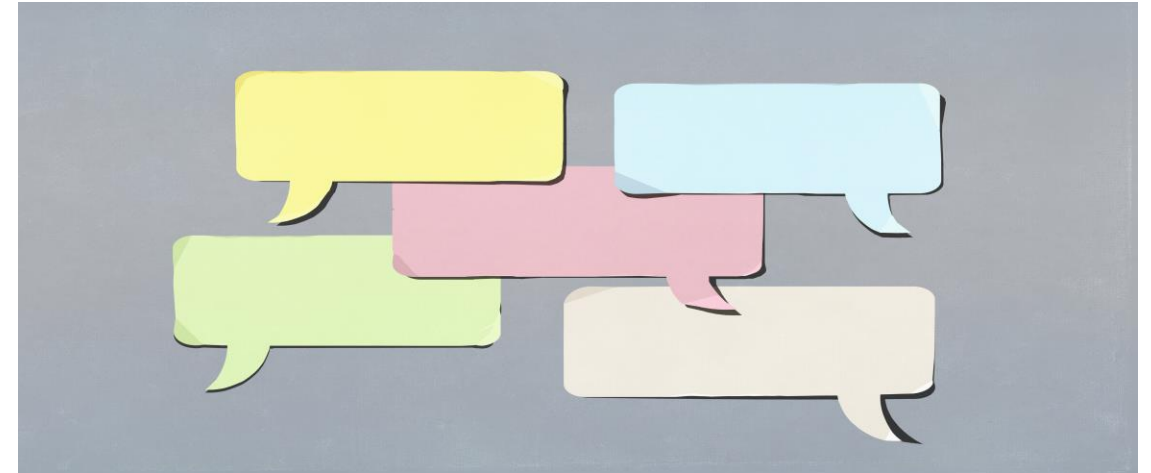
- Climbing and using the slide independently encouraged **critical thinking** and **decision-making**.
- Children assessed risks and solved problems as they navigated the play equipment.

Spatial Awareness:

- Moving through the environment helped develop **spatial awareness** by understanding space, distance, and body positioning.



(Sandseter, 2009), (Ginsburg, 2007)



Social and Emotional Development

■ Social Interaction:

- Interacting with peers while playing on swings, slides, and climbing structures fostered **social skills** like sharing, taking turns, and cooperation.
- Also interacted with adults but largely played independently.

■ Confidence and Self-Esteem:

- Engaging in independent play boosted **confidence** and **self-esteem** as children successfully used equipment on their own.
- Accomplishment from climbing and sliding independently gave children a sense of autonomy.

■ Emotional Regulation:

- Risk-taking activities like spinning on swings helped children experience and manage **excitement, fear, and confidence**.
- These experiences support the development of **emotional resilience** and **self-regulation**.

SCHOOL C AGE GROUP: 9-10

■ Observation Context

■ Outdoor Space:

- **Concrete area** used for the session, with no natural grass or mud.
- The **field** on the far-right side of the school was not used.
- Two playground areas with marked-out pitches and games on the floor.
- One playground had a **sheltered area** with benches where some children sat to read books.
- The other playground had a small **verge of grass**.
- **Netball nets** on the sheltered playground.

■ Age Group: 9-10 years old.

■ Session Focus: Activities incorporated **SKIP training** principles (Skill-based, Kinesthetic, Inclusive, and Progressive).

Key Observations

Warm-Up Exercises:

- Warm-up included **low, medium, and high levels** of movement.
- Part of the **SKIP training** methodology to prepare the children for more intense physical activity.

Group Games:

- Focused on **spatial awareness** and **slow-to-fast movements**.
- **Buddy work** activities emphasizing positioning and adjusting movements relative to others.

Netball Target Practice:

- Children split into groups to practice **target shooting** with netball hoops.
- Progressed into **partner passing drills** including **bounce passes**, **chest-level passes**, and **high and low catches** while maintaining **spatial awareness**.

Competitive Team Games:

- Six teams competed using **cones**, **hurdles**, and different shaped balls.
- Children had to navigate through cones and over hurdles, focusing on **one-leg** movements to improve **coordination**.

IMPACT ON DEVELOPMENT

■ Confidence and Self-Esteem:

- Success in passing drills and obstacle navigation boosted **confidence** and **self-esteem**.
- Children felt **accomplished** when they completed tasks independently and as a team.

■ Emotional Regulation:

- Competitive aspects required children to manage **excitement**, **frustration**, and **disappointment**.
- Success and failure in games contributed to the development of **emotional resilience** and **self-regulation**.
- **Environmental Impact: Concrete Ground vs. Natural Surfaces**

■ Positives of Concrete:

- **Flat and stable** surface ideal for activities requiring **consistent movement**.
- **Durable** for high-impact activities like running, jumping, and team games.

■ Negatives of Concrete:

- Hard surface may cause **impact-related injuries**, such as bruises or sprains.
- **Lack of cushioning** can increase the risk of abrasions and discomfort when children fall or slide.
- **Absence of sensory engagement** with natural elements (grass or mud).
- Concrete is **less forgiving** on the joints compared to natural grass or mud.
- **Relating to SKIP Training**

■ SKIP Training Principles:

- Warm-ups and activities incorporated **spatial awareness**, **progressive skill development**, and **inclusive participation**.
- The session's focus on **coordination**, **targeting**, and **problem-solving** aligns with the principles of SKIP training, promoting both physical and cognitive development in a fun and inclusive environment.

Physical Development

■ Gross Motor Skills:

- Warm-up exercises helped develop **balance**, **agility**, and **physical fitness**.
- Team games and obstacle navigation improved **coordination**, **muscle strength**, and **endurance**.

■ Fine Motor Skills:

- Partner passing drills (bounce passes, chest-level passes, and catching) enhanced **hand-eye coordination**, **dexterity**, and **timing**.

■ Cognitive Development

■ Spatial Awareness:

- Focused on understanding **distance**, **direction**, and **positioning** through buddy work and partner passing.
- **Targeting** exercises helped improve children's ability to judge **depth perception** and spatial reasoning.

■ Problem-Solving and Strategy:

- Competitive games encouraged **creative problem-solving** and **strategic thinking** (especially in team coordination and one-leg movements).

■ Social and Emotional Development

■ Teamwork and Cooperation:

- Group games and competitive team activities fostered **communication**, **collaboration**, and **cooperation**.
- **Buddy work** emphasized helping peers and improving communication skills.

STEP FRAMEWORK

- **Inclusion Strategies (STEP Framework)**
- **STEP Model (Space, Task, Equipment, People):**
 - Ensured all children, regardless of ability, could participate in activities.
- **School C:**
 - Children with different abilities took on modified roles (e.g., "assistants" in drills).
- **School A and B:**
 - Varied equipment allowed children to engage at their own level.
 - Assistive tools for children with limited physical skills; more complex tasks for others (e.g., climbing trees, balancing).

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFORDANCES AND NATURE'S ROLE

- **Role of Nature:**
 - Natural materials (e.g., leaves, twigs, mud) supported sensory development and creativity at School A.
- **Nature-Based Learning:**
 - Linked to improved concentration, cognitive function, and physical activity.
- **School B and C:**
 - Nature elements (tree stumps, grass) enhanced **balance, coordination, and spatial reasoning**.
 - Moving across different surfaces improved sensory-motor control.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PRACTICE INCLUDE

- 1. Expanding Outdoor Learning Areas**
- 2. Continued Use of the STEP Framework**
- 3. Integration of Nature-Based Activities**

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