Streets Ahead: Findings on Outdoor Play from the Growing Up in Ireland Study

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Play is important...

Overall Wellbeing
- Healthy growth, development
- Socio-emotional development, self regulation
- Cognition, problem-solving
- Language

Communication, Nurturing friendships

Resilience

Creativity

Pellegrini and Smith, 1998

Coelho et al., (2017)

Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2015)

Russ (2003)

Savina (2014)

(Ramani, 2014)

Holmes (2015)
Call for action to end children's 'battery-hen existence' in summer holidays

Children's commissioner says GPs should offer 'play on prescription' to combat obesity and poor mental health

Let Kids Play

Doctors should prescribe playtime for young children, the American Academy of Pediatrics says.
Outdoor play

• Opportunities to move more freely

• Significantly more active outdoors than indoors (Engelen et al., 2015)

• Explore and engage with natural materials and resources (Fjortoft, 2001)

• Parents identified playing outside with friends/neighbours as the most successful method to increase the amount of physical activity their child gets (Safefood, 2017)
Outdoor play

- Activities vary in how much social interaction and cooperation is required with other children:
  - reciprocal role-taking
  - detection of play signals,
  - turn taking (Pellegrini, 1987)

- And in how cognitively demanding they are:
  - remembering rules
  - keeping score
  - knowing the next step to be completed (Veiga et al., 2017)
A Growing Evidence Base...

- Frost (2012) - A changing culture of play
- Gill (2014)
- Bento & Dias (2017)
- Tremblay et al. (2015) - Position Paper
- Waller (2010) - SIGs
- UK Children’s Commissioner (2018)
- McPherson et al. (2013)
- Barnardos (2014)
- Carol Duffy - Early Childhood Ireland
- Kiernan & Devine (2010)
- O’Malley (2014)
- ESRI (2013)
- Lynch et al. (2018) outdoors for all
- Kilkelly, Lynch et al. (2016)
- Smyth, E. (2016)
Importance of the Outdoor Environments in ECCE related Policy & Legislation...

What about at home?...look at the evidence
Lynch (2017) argues there is a lack of policy in Ireland to support engagement with outdoors in children and lack of data to guide policy. Little evidence of GUI data being used to examine ‘play itself, separate to sport, exercise and leisure’ (Lynch, 2017).
Research questions

• What types of outdoor play do Irish children most frequently engage in?

• What effect does outdoor play have on development?

• How does the neighbourhood environment affect levels of outdoor play?
The Growing up in Ireland study is a longitudinal, nationally representative study of young children in Ireland.

- 11,100 infants at 9 months old (Sept, 08- March, 09)
- Wave 3 and Wave 4 data aged 5 and 7/8
Methodology

• **Wave 3 of data – Age 5**
  - 9001 families
  - Response of the primary caregiver to a series of questions

• **Wave 4 of data – Age 7/8**
  - 5,308 families
  - A postal survey
  - Response of the primary caregiver to a series of questions
Measures Age 5

- Outdoor play: How often...
  - Plays chasing
  - Plays with a ball
  - Rides a bike, tricycle or scooter
  - Climbs on trees, climbing frames, wall bars, etc
  - Skates

Measures Age 7

- Outdoor play: How often...
  - Plays games that involve a lot of running around, like football
  - Plays games that involve some activity like trampolining
  - Rides a bike, tricycle or scooter
Research questions

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Results

7 year old outdoor play

Running Games | Bike | Activity Games

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

- Everyday
- 3-6 times per week
- 1-2 times per week
- < Once a week
- Never

Everyday | 3-6 times per week | 1-2 times per week | < Once a week | Never
Research questions

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• **What effect does outdoor play have on development?**

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Socio-Emotional Measures - Age 7

• **Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)** – brief behavioural screening questionnaire widely used by researchers and clinicians
  – Emotional
  – Conduct
  – Hyperactivity
  – Peer Problems  (above give a combined score of Total Difficulties)
  – Prosocial

• **Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) Rating Scales** – widely used rating scale to provide a picture of social skills
  – Assertion
  – Responsibility
  – Empathy
  – Self Control
Results

SDQ Total Difficulties Score by frequency of activity age 7

R^2 = .02, p < .001
Results

SDQ Prosocial Score by frequency of activity age 7

R² = .03, p < .001
Results

SSIS scores by 'running around' frequency Age 7

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<th>Empathy</th>
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Research questions

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Neighbourhood Measures - Age 5

- Neighbourhood Environment
  - Overall safety
  - Safety for child to play outside during the day
  - Parks, playgrounds, traffic, paths, lighting
  - Antisocial behaviours

What are the neighbourhoods like?
Results

Neighbourhood Environment - Antisocial Behaviour

Rubbish and litter lying about: Very common - 10%, Fairly common - 20%, Not very common - 40%, Not at all common - 30%

Homes and gardens in bad condition: Very common - 10%, Fairly common - 20%, Not very common - 40%, Not at all common - 30%

Vandalism and deliberate damage to property: Very common - 10%, Fairly common - 20%, Not very common - 40%, Not at all common - 30%

People being drunk or taking drugs in public: Very common - 10%, Fairly common - 20%, Not very common - 40%, Not at all common - 30%
Results

Neighbourhood Environment – Safety and play spaces

- Safe neighbourhood
- Safe for children to play outside
- People can be trusted
- Good parks & play spaces
- Good paths, roads & lighting
- Heavy traffic

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
Percentage engaged in daily activities - 'It is safe for children to play outside during the day'

Results

$p < .001$
Parent’s perceived safety of the neighbourhood for outdoor play is associated with reported levels of outdoor play (Egan & Pope, 2018)

Consistent with previous international research

Neighbourhood environment is associated with children’s sedentary behaviour outside school hours (Veitch et al., 2011)

Greater parental satisfaction with nearby play spaces associated with less screen time (Veitch et al., 2011) and more hours of outdoor play (Tolbert Kimbro et al., 2011)
Conclusions

• Young Children in Ireland have the right to play outdoors

• Outdoor play has a positive role to play in many aspects of development, including socio-emotional development

• But neighbourhood safety (or perceived neighbourhood safety) is a barrier to outdoor play

• Parents, ECCE & primary teachers, afterschool, local communities and policy makers need to consider how outdoor play can be encouraged and facilitated
How our unequal society makes it harder for us to live long and healthy lives

It's not just smoking, drinking and failing to do any exercise that shortens lives – the community we live in also affects our ability to make healthy choices.

A Playful City - turning Dublin into Ireland's first city of play

Outdoor Play and Social Inclusion: Public Playspace Audit RECORD FORM

Lynch, Moore & Prellwitx, 2017
Thank You!

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• Thanks to all that families that so generously continue to contribute to the Growing Up in Ireland Study (www.growingup.ie)

• GUI Data is archived by the Irish Social Science Data Archive in UCD (www.ucd.ie/issda)