

Outdoor play and the holistic development of learners in primary schools

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Abstract

The holistic development of learners outside the classroom through outdoor play is the focus of this article. Play allows learners to expand their understanding of themselves and others, their knowledge of the physical world, and their ability to communicate with peers and educators. However, despite the countless values of outdoor play on the welfare of learners, there is an accumulative concern about its decline in primary schools. The objective of this article is to identify and describe the role of outdoor play in the holistic development of learners in primary schools in North West province, South Africa. The research on which this article is based made use of a mixed-mode methodological approach to obtain the views of a wider teacher community about outdoor play through questionnaires, but also to obtain personal views of teachers through interviews. It was found that schools are not equal in providing opportunities for learners for outside play. It was also found that outdoor play assists primary school pupils to prepare for later life as it enables them to deal with conflict, and care for/share among themselves. Given that the benefits and risks of outdoor play may vary across different cultures, countries and population groups, special attention should be given to the different contexts and conditions in which learners are born, live, and play.

Keywords: outdoor play, holistic development, psychomotor development, affective development, cognitive development

Introduction

To improve your mind without the cultivation of your physical gifts would be a very hollow victory. Elevating your mind and body to their highest level without nurturing your soul would leave you feeling very empty and unfulfilled. But when you dedicate your energies to unlocking the full potential of all three of your human endowments, you will taste the divine ecstasy of an enlightened life. (Robin S. Sharma, *The monk who sold his Ferrari*, 2004, p. 98)

This article gives a view on the integration of the development of mind and body in five primary schools in North West province (NWP) in South Africa. The development of learners outside the classroom during outdoor play is the focus of this article. Play allows learners to expand their understanding of themselves and others, their knowledge of the physical world, and their ability to communicate with peers and educators (Ferne, n.d.). Primary school learners' play activities are characterised by movement, such as tumbling and rough playing and it sometimes poses a high risk of danger (Ferne, n.d.).

Outdoor play is regarded as free-flowing, pleasurable activities initiated by learners themselves (Flint, n.d.; Levesque, n.d.) with no risk for failure (Casey, 2007), where the emphasis is on having fun and learning skills (Hartas, 2008; Segal & Bardige, 2006). The activities happen outdoors (Gilbertson et al., 2006) and while playing outdoors, learners exercise both their bodies and their brains (Flint, n.d.; Levesque n.d.).

Outdoor play is regarded as essential for the social, emotional, physical and cognitive (thus holistic) development of a learner (Flint n.d.; Levesque, n.d.). Such play can unlock human potential and the issue of not integrating it into the primary school curriculum is a disadvantage for learners (Barrett, 2004; Collister, 2001). Kempainen, et al. (2005) are of the view that outdoor play should be mandatory in schools. Watkinson (2010), and Horine and Stotlar (2004) believe that when it is managed properly, outdoor play is a powerful builder of character, and it creates a framework for self-discipline and allows learners to strive to attain the highest level of performance in academic affairs.

Outdoor play allows learners to make decisions, communicate, share ideas and facilities, help and listen to others, and participate at their level (Barrett 2004). This form of play is fundamental to preventing and reducing boredom and obesity among learners in schools (Casey, 2007; Van Jaarsveld, 2008; Waller, 2009).

There have not been studies about outdoor play management to support the holistic development of learners in Dr Kenneth Kaunda District (DKKD) in the NWP of South Africa. The absence of outdoor play research in this area of DKKD comprises a knowledge gap that this article attempts to fill.

A mixed-method research design that encapsulated qualitative and quantitative approaches was applied to investigate the management of outdoor play to support the holistic development of learners in selected primary schools in NWP.

Research question

The research question that needs to be answered in this article is: How does outdoor play enhance the holistic development of learners in primary schools in NWP, South Africa?

Method

This study employed a mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches, popularly called a mix-method by Lynch (2010). A qualitative approach was used, based on the four main purposes of Leedy and Ormrod (2005), namely, description, interpretation, verification and evaluation. The quantitative approach helped to describe and make interpretations about the current status of outdoor play management to support the notion of the holistic development of learners (Maree, 2007) more effectively.

A semi-structured interview was used to collect qualitative data because it gave teacher respondents the freedom to express their feelings and perceptions without having restrictions imposed by the researcher. It gave the researcher the flexibility to explore reasons and motives for given responses and to probe further directions specified in the interview schedule (Robson, 2002). Quantitative data were collected using a questionnaire.

Document analysis was also utilised in gathering primary data for the research. Photographs were also used to capture images of the social world of outdoor play within DKKD primary schools. The resulting photographs were interpreted in text.

Permission was sought from the Department of Education Management under which the DKKD school to conduct the study. School principals gave approval for the researcher to visit their schools and all respondents signed a consent form that specified their anonymity and confidentiality of the data collected. Aspects that related to the consent form such as the right to self-determination and justice, the right to informed consent, and the right to privacy were attended to.

Learner preparation through diverse types of outdoor play

Hartog (2010), Martin (2002) and Martin et al. (2004) argue that learners are not at school to obtain academic knowledge only. Learners' good performance in mathematics, reading and writing, does not necessarily enhance their social acceptance or ability to build relationships. Besides academic skills which form part of the school programme, outdoor play prepares learners for life, because it helps the learner to develop physically, spiritually, emotionally and intellectually (Watkinson, 2010). Hence, Alan Johnson emphasises that outdoor play should be at the heart of every school's curriculum and ethos (Waller, 2009).

Child play

Primary school learners' play ranges from simple physical play like hopscotch to more complex cognitive play in games with rules such as cards or chess (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, n.d.). Learners engage in different types of play based on the development of their thinking, reasoning, language and social skills (DoE, 2008). Sheridan (2008) identifies distinct types of outdoor play which represent and contribute to the development of primary school learners in different areas.

Active play

Active play leads to the physical development of children through the utilisation of the head, trunk and limbs in sitting, crawling, standing, running, climbing, jumping, throwing, kicking

and catching. It also involves rough and tumble play, and it is a means of gaining strength, agility and coordination (Sheridan, 2008).

Imitative play

Imitative play originates from the learner who has observed a significant action and repeats it (Sheridan, 2008). For example, a boy who cannot master the skill of kicking and balancing a ball, is repeatedly left out by his friends in team play. Therefore, he will observe and imitate his friends and make an effort to master these skills. The success of mastering such skills is fulfilling because it allows the child to socialise and be part of the team.

Pretend play

Pretend play according to Stevenson (2010) is an imaginative game or fantasy whereby learners engage in pretending to be grown-ups. It is an opportunity to put insights and skills into action and is therefore dependent on the utilisation of imagination and creativity (Sheridan, 2008). That is why learners enjoy pretending and role-playing with materials such as dress-up clothes, hair dryers, mirrors, scarves, belts, helmets, bags or suitcases (DoE, 2008). Pretend play encourages language and vocabulary development; it enhances reasoning and problem-solving abilities, especially in situations where contradictory facts are considered. It further fosters flexible and inventive thinking (McCain et al., 2007).

Cognitive play

Knowledge of types of cognitive play helps educators to provide appropriate environments that support learners' development. It enables them to enjoy, encourage and appreciate age-appropriate play behaviour (Isenberg & Jalongo, 1997). The following are some examples of cognitive play.

Constructive play

Constructive play involves creating something such as a tower of building blocks. It requires a combination of fine movements, sensory capacity and cognitive and symbolic understanding. To build something, a learner needs not only to be able to manipulate the components, but they should also be able to visualise and plan the object in her/his head (Sheridan, 2008).

Socio-dramatic play

Socio-dramatic play relates strongly to learners' cognitive and social abilities (SMoE, n.d.). It develops abstract thinking and refines learners' understandings of the world (McCain et al., 2007) and the ability to solve problems in a safe context (Smilansky & Sheftaya, 1990). Imagination is to learners what problem-solving is to adults.

Games with rules

Sheridan (2008) advocates that games with rules assume a degree of understanding about sharing; taking turns for fair play and the accurate recording of results. Games with rules become more prominent around the age of four years onwards when small groups of children begin to improvise their own rules for cooperative play. However, team games which challenge competitiveness in older learners become increasingly subjected to rules (Sheridan, 2008). For learners, initial play is mostly a social, fun experience that requires no serious techniques. Later on, learners enjoy games with rules such as card and board games, and they enjoy utilising materials to make their own games such as cards, dice and game counters (DoE, 2008, p. 3).

Demers (2008) believes that before thinking of game ideas, learners need to be given background information on what makes a good game. A good game must meet the following requirements: it should be safe; the rules should be simple; there should be adequate space; and it should be fun and at the same time challenging. Such a game should allow participants with various skill levels and abilities to participate.

Outdoor play in primary school

Outdoor play happens during breaks or intervals, which Milteer and Ginsburg (2012) regard as free time. This free period from the classroom's routine enables learners to refocus their energies and attention on their school work. It is a typical mid-morning or mid-afternoon free time or break from the normal academic routine. This free or interval time happens outdoors whenever possible so that learners can play and have an opportunity to "let off steam" during acceptable outdoor play activities (Gallahue & Donnelly, 2003). Milteer and Ginsburg (2012) argue that outdoor play is not only essential for the cognitive, physical, social and emotional

well-being of learners but offers academic enrichment opportunities that are vital for some children's ability to progress academically. The keys to a successful outdoor play interval are proper facilities and ample equipment.

The value of outdoor play

Outdoor play offers children the opportunity to be creative and self-expressive (White, 2007). Learners' imagination is stretched beyond the constraints of the classroom (Levesque, n.d.). This implies that learners can apply their five senses in a natural situation. For example, learners could touch and smell a fresh flower, visualise the scenery of the open spaces and smell the grass. Outdoor play provides ample opportunity for this kind of informal learning.

Demers (2008) indicates a further value of outdoor play is that it addresses four psychological needs. First, outdoor play offers an opportunity to form relationships, belong to a group and be connected to others. Second, learners learn to set goals and try to improve as they benchmark their success with that of their peers. Third, outdoor play also offers learners a chance to make their own decisions. Fourth, the learners enjoy the play activity.

Diverse knowledge domains associated with outdoor play development

Ogilvie (2004) is of the opinion that outdoor play learning consists of three domains, namely the psychomotor domain (which refers to movement, skills and behavioural actions); the cognitive domain (which refers to thoughts and ideas); and the affective domain (which refers to feelings and emotions). These are known as the domains of knowledge, skills and attitudes (Rapule, 2007). Skills developed during outdoor play are essential later in life. Knowledge refers to facts and information essential to performing a task; skills refer to abilities to act in ways concurrent with successful job performance; and attitudes deal with feelings about performance (Ogilvie, 2004).

Psychomotor domain development

The psychomotor domain includes physical movements, coordination and utilisation of the motor skills areas. The development of these skills requires practice and is measured in terms of speed, precision, distance, procedures and techniques in their execution during outdoor play

activities (Rapule, 2007). Psychomotor skills are developed during activities such as manual tasks and physical movement. Gallahue and Donnelly (2003) view psychomotoric development as a progressive change in one's movement behaviour brought about by the interaction between the movement task, the biology of the individual and the outdoor play space conditions.

Movement skill acquisition

Movement skill acquisition is at the core of the outdoor play programme. The term movement skill means the development of motor control, precision and accuracy in the performance of both fundamental and specialised movements by children (Gallahue & Donnelly, 2003). For example, as children mature, the fundamental movement skills developed in the earlier years are applied as complex skills in a wide variety of games and to various outdoor play activities such as sport and dance. The level of functioning in locomotion, manipulation and stability happens gradually as learners develop (Gallahue & Donnelly, 2003).

Physical activity and fitness enhancement

Learners can achieve health objectives in outdoor play through fitness activities that enhance the ability and motivation (Haibach, Reid & Collier, 2011) of children to participate in a variety of outdoor play activities. Gallahue and Donnelly (2003) describe physical fitness as the ability to perform daily tasks without fatigue and to have sufficient energy reserves for participation in additional physical activities. Muscular strength, muscular endurance, cardiovascular endurance, joint flexibility and body composition are therefore health-related fitness components of fitness.

Performance-related fitness

According to Gallahue and Donnelly (2003), components of performance-related fitness are balance, coordination, agility, speed of movement, and power. Children's health-related fitness and performance-related fitness play important roles in the development of total fitness. Performance-related fitness relates to psychomotor development.

Cognitive domain development

Bjorklund (2005) and Rapule (2007) describe cognition as a mental process by which knowledge is acquired and manipulated. Cognition has also to do with the process of organising and retaining knowledge (Rapule, 2007). Therefore, cognitive development is perceived as a constructive process with learners playing an active role in the construction of their knowledge during outdoor play (Bjorklund, 2005).

Although outdoor play contributes to the acquisition of movement skills and fitness enhancement, it also allows opportunities for cognitive development. Cognition leads to a progressive change in the ability to think, reason and act. Children are both multi-sensory and active learners. Outdoor play should therefore also focus on concept learning and perceptual-motor learning (Gallahue & Donnelly, 2003).

Brain research confirms the importance of play in learners' development (McCain et al., 2007). Educators should interact with children, create play opportunities that can replace passive activities such as television watching, and provide simple play materials that could stimulate investigation and learning (Frost, 2012) because play is important for healthy brain development (Milteer & Ginsburg, 2012).

Concept learning

Gallahue and Donnelly (2003) are of the view that physical activities in the outdoor play space can be utilised to enhance the understanding and application of cognitive and academic learning. Concept learning leads to a permanent change in one's motor behaviour brought about by experiences designed to foster an understanding of the concepts of the outdoor play programme related to movement, skill, fitness and activity.

Cognitive concept learning can be effectively taught through movement and play. For example, when a learner is actively participating in an outdoor play game that is teaching academic concepts, her/his attention is not easily distracted by external stimuli. Active learning through outdoor play activities allows the learners to deal with their world in concrete terms. Learners regard outdoor play as fun; not to be equated with the routine of the classroom (Gallahue & Donnelly, 2003). The implication thereof is that some learners benefit greatly from a programme that integrates outdoor play activities with academic concept development.

Perceptual-motor learning

This involves the establishment and refinement of sensory sensitivity to one's world through outdoor play activity of movement. This sensory sensitivity entails developing and refining an adequate spatial and temporal world. All movement occurs in outdoor play space and involves an element of time (Gallahue & Donnelly, 2003). It is possible to enhance children's knowledge of their spatial world by involving them in outdoor play movement activities that contribute to their body, directional and space awareness.

Gallahue and Donnelly (2003) assert that through good teaching, outdoor play and movement activities become effective ways of increasing learners' awareness of themselves and the world around them. It is for this reason that the proper utilisation of the "teachable moment" and emphasis on developing the concepts of why, what, how and when in relation to one's outdoor play movement, are important in assisting learners to learn by reinforcing information acquired in the traditional setting of the classroom.

Affective domain development

The learning outcomes of the affective domain emphasise an emotion or degree of acceptance or rejection towards a particular subject or phenomenon like outdoor play (Rapule, 2007). Thus, the outcomes of this domain will include how learners deal with interest, attitudes, appreciation, values, motivations, enthusiasm and emotional sets of an outdoor play phenomenon.

An essential outcome of any quality outdoor play programme should be an enhancement in the affective domain. Affective growth, which is also referred to as social-emotional development, has to do with learning that increases the ability of children to act, interact and react effectively with other people as well as with themselves (Gallahue & Donnelly, 2003).

Learners engage in outdoor play activities that play an important role in how they view themselves as individuals, how they relate to their peers and how they utilise free time in an outdoor play space (Gallahue & Donnelly, 2003). Learners are therefore not likely to have a sense of the self, separated from their outdoor play space (Haibach et al., 2011).

Self-concept enhancement

Self-concept refers to an individual's view of her/his competence in physical, cognitive and social activities in outdoor play (Gair, 1997). Being good at outdoor play activities such as games and sport contributes to the development of a positive and stable self-concept in children. Being active and energetic, children utilise play and movement activities as ways to learn more about themselves and their bodies.

Competence motivation

Development of the self-concept depends on competence motivation (Haibach et al., 2011). Learners are motivated to find opportunities to demonstrate mastery or competence during outdoor play. For example, a foundation phase learner may demonstrate an intrinsic interest in mastering her/his world by spending hours playing with blocks, stacking them, lining them up, or placing them into and taking them out of a container. As success is achieved, feelings of competence and control develop (Haibach et al., 2011).

Learners compete during outdoor play. This leads to participation in the psychomotor domain, for example in outdoor play activities such as soccer or high-jump. Such participation is referred to more formally as mastery attempts. Challenges should exist regarding the skills to be mastered; ones that are complex but realistic. Activities that allow improvement with practice are preferred to those that are too hard or too simple (Haibach et al., 2011). However, learners who experience low competence motivation may choose not to be involved, making no attempts at mastery. Such learners will not participate in outdoor play activities.

Positive socialisation

Positive socialisation in outdoor play is exhibited during fair play, cooperative behaviour and being a good participant (Gallahue & Donnelly, 2003). Outdoor play activities regularly occur in a social setting that requires learners to make decisions about both cooperative and competitive behaviours. Outdoor play has remarkable potential to promote positive moral behaviour and to teach virtues such as honesty, teamwork, loyalty and self-control.

Haibach et al. (2011) advocate three elements that are essential for the socialisation of children during outdoor play activities. These are socialising agents (peers and educators); social situations (outdoor play space and equipment) and personal attributes (perceived sporting ability). The immediate social network of the learner and the availability of outdoor play space influence the physical activity participation of learners at school. In the foundation phase, younger learners may watch older learners and peers participating in physical activities and listen to them talking about such activities. Ultimately, this will influence the learner's selection of outdoor play activities (Haibach et al., 2011). According to Rapule (2007), the affective domain provides a framework for education in general, that is, teaching, learning, assessing and evaluating.

Findings and discussion

Holistic development

Hartoog (2010), Martin (2002) and Martin et al. (2004) believe that children are not at school to obtain academic knowledge only. Good academic performance may not necessarily enhance their social acceptance or ability to build friendships. For Watkinson (2010), De Witt (2009) and Evans et al. (2003), outdoor play is one aspect of the young child's life that prepares her/him to develop holistically: physically, spiritually, emotionally and intellectually. Rapule (2007), Flint (n.d.), Levesque (n.d.) and Louw (1991) prefer the terms cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. Findings related to these three domains are described in the following paragraphs.

Cognitive development

While pretend play is pivotal in the cognitive development of a learner (Stevenson, 2010; DoE, 2008; McCain et al., 2007), 45% of respondents indicated that they do not attend to pretend play during outdoor play sessions of foundation phase learners. Pretend play is important because it encourages the language and vocabulary growth of learners; it increases memory abilities, it enhances reasoning and problem-solving abilities, especially in situations when contradictory facts are considered and it fosters flexible and inventive thinking of learners (McCain et al., 2007).

Another point of view that emerged from the interviews was that the educator has the responsibility to “intervene when there is a problem” and she/he should not expect the learners should solve problems themselves. This thinking is against what Welford (n.d.) and Yorks and Kasl (n.d.) advocate, that once the learner has solved her/his own problems during outdoor play, the learner can involve her/his other modes of learning, such as imagination, and thinking to solve future problems by her/himself.

Illustration 1 indicates how learners are allowed to use chess for their cognitive development during break at a former Model C school, which is a school model that existed for privileged white children before 1994. Since then, most schools have become racially integrated. The other schools in the sample do not offer their learners this opportunity.



Illustration 1: Chess for cognitive development

An activity such as chess includes academic concepts, such as vertical, diagonal and horizontal, which can stimulate mathematical thinking. It also teaches learners the principle of taking decisions and bearing the consequences of your choices.

Physical activity such as hopscotch is also regarded as intellectually stimulating because learners have to count when they jump. According to a respondent, hopscotch allows the learners to improvise and to create “...whatever game they want to play”. A further advantage of hopscotch in the foundation phase is that the rules of the game require the learner to put one foot out to miss a block and “...is creative and stimulating for the brain”. There is also a sandpit available “...where they could role play farming or building a castle”; a view similar to that of Stevenson (2010). As advocated by DoE (2008, p. 3), learners also get the opportunity to use their own imagination where equipment is lacking.

Affective development

Affective development refers to feelings and emotions (Ogilvie, 2004; Rapule, 2007). For a learner to develop holistically, she/he does not only need physical and cognitive development but affective development as well. This domain includes the manner in which learners deal with interest, attitudes, appreciation, values, motivation, enthusiasm and emotional behaviour (Rapule, 2007).

Honesty during outdoor play

Of the 368 respondents, 83% were in agreement with the statement that they do guide learners to be fair and honest during outdoor play. These responses agree with the view upheld by Demers (2008, p. 91) who advocates that honesty is an admirable character trait with regard to the holistic development of a learner.

Emotions during outdoor play

Findings from the interview responses indicated that learners' emotions are stimulated through active play. "They touch, smell, run and laugh and that has an impact on their game." Being happy and running around encourages even a fearful learner who sees others playing. Learners give each other a helping hand and a fearful learner is able to move from an undeveloped emotional state to an acceptable emotional level. These responses agree with Sheridan's view (2008, p. 10) that there are direct links between outdoor play and learners' emotions. During outdoor play, the emotional conflicts and anxieties of learners are revealed. One respondent emphasised that "In any outdoor play activity the spirit of competition prevails. Each learner wishes to win and the emotions are high because of the commitment in the activity". Such competition-driven motivation indicated by a respondent is quite relevant to a respondent who indicated that "while playing, other learners may destruct or interfere with other learners' play. The group will get angry and react. That shows how they react emotionally." We are of the view that Haibach et al. (20011) are correct when saying that challenges exist concerning the skills to be mastered by learners during outdoor play. Indeed, the emotions of learners get stimulated during outdoor play participation and they could start to fight, sometimes physically, owing to competition to be the best in any group for a specific activity. Based on observation

of specific outdoor play activities such as tennis in a former Model C school, learners demonstrated their eagerness to handle the tennis racket correctly, while boys in four schools demonstrated their dribbling skills. In the former Model C school, boys are engaged in rugby. The girls' eagerness to demonstrate their skills in netball was observed in all five schools.

Sheridan (2008) is of the opinion that educators should observe learners as they play to identify possible problems that could be resolved by encouraging and guiding the learners during outdoor play to gain control over conflicting emotions. However, illustration 2 portrays a learner, who, because of isolation, does not experience the joy of outdoor play which would otherwise contribute to her holistic development.



Illustration 2: A learner in need of affective growth feelings

A summary of responses from the interviews indicated that "...learners express their feelings without any limitation during outdoor play. Learners will play whatever comes to their mind to express their feelings". In this instance "...learners will express their feelings by running around as captured in illustration 3, shouting and showing how they enjoy their outdoor playtime.

According to our view, only when the feeling mode during outdoor play is firmly in place, the learners would be free to tap into the other three modes of the learning model, namely, imagination, thinking and praxis (Welford, n.d.; Yorks and Kasl, n.d.) for holistic development.



Illustration 3: Learners expressing their feelings by running and chasing each other

Responses during interviews and observations substantiate the views of White (2007) and the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework of 2007 who argue that learners can come to grips with their feelings when they are involved in outdoor play for their holistic development. One respondent, however, was of the view that some learners are still sensitive and emotional. Once teased they can display aggressive behaviour especially in cases when they are not used to it from the home settings. This was revealed by one of the teacher respondents who noted that learners get easily teased or cross and start crying to express their feelings. This is contained in the quote as follows: “Learners display aggressive behaviour due to lack of guidance by their parents on how to resolve problems during outdoor play. They therefore act aggressively and such behaviour could lead to the learner becoming a bully.” Such behaviour is in contrast to what is expected as socially acceptable behaviour (Sheridan 2008). Outdoor play could contribute to the teaching of acceptable behaviour.

Socialisation

Lack of social-emotional development, which includes learning that increases the ability of a learner to act, interact and react effectively with other people can be seen in illustration 2. It depicts the state of non-development of a learner which requires the educator’s intervention as described by Pink (2001) and Wells (1997) for social construction. Sheehy (2006) is of the view that the primary school is the first source to give guidance and help to shape the character

of children through outdoor play activities. Knowledge of such outdoor play activities is shared and passed on by friends or peers and educators within the primary school.

The situation illustrated (illustration 2) contradicts the views of Mukherji and Albon (2010) which indicate that learning from others remains an important source of information about the world around children. For learners to see themselves as individuals and relate effectively with peers, Gallahue and Donnelly (2003) are of the view that educators have to play a crucial role in guiding learners who are withdrawn, such as the one in illustration 2. Learners who are guided in this regard by educators shall likely not show the behaviour of separation from their peers (Haibach et al., 2011) as argued during the interview:

Children at this age seldom see skin colour. They learn a great deal from one another and they teach each other different games. Some play hopscotch and others have stockings from their parents made into a long elastic band.. If one struggles, it your own problem in European society. But Africans share and support one another.

Knowledge of outdoor play is shared and passed on by friends within the primary school during their engagement in outdoor play activities (Sheehy, 2006). According to Mukherji and Albon (2010) and Gair (1997), strengthening learners' socialisation and self-concept seems not to be reflected in illustration 2. Such learners drift away from friends and lose their socialising skills as learned from the study conducted in Japan (Afsharlahoori & Aoki, 2011) and in America (White & Stoecklin, n.d.). The responses to a questionnaire item that states that learners can make "...contact with other children" also indicated that a large number (35%) of respondents indicated that learners do not socialise or make contact with other children.

One respondent described the role of socialisation in outdoor play as follows:

Playing outside gives learners a chance to socialise. In games, learners need to share; giving other learners a chance. For them to succeed in games they need one another and it makes sense to them that you cannot succeed alone. Even when they have to pick whom they are going to play with, they always pick the best, because they have observed who is best at an activity. In other cases, they want to play with their friends, because they see they cannot do it on their own. For the ball to come and go to the

goal, one has to kick the ball and pass it to a friend. If you are alone, that cannot happen. This view is in agreement with Haibach et al. (2011) who cite three elements that are essential during outdoor play for the socialisation of children that ensures holistic development: socialising agents (peers); social situations (outdoor play opportunities) and personal attributes (perceived sporting ability).

Another benefit of outdoor play is that established relationships which are formed within the classrooms are extended when learners get the opportunity to form groups when they have to do a specific activity as organised by a team member during outdoor play. Learners who are too shy to get involved in class activities “are given an opportunity on an informal level outside the classroom to say or to do something”. Except for the development of the skill to solve problems, learners’ social involvement also becomes enhanced. The child’s immediate social network of peers and the availability of social spaces such as an outdoor play space, influence the affective development of learners through physically active participation of learners at school (Haibach et al., 2011). Although educators are not as influential as parents at home, they do have a significant socialising influence on learners at school (Haibach et al., 2011). Their actions may have a detrimental impact on the participation of learners in outdoor play if no support is permitted to have the freedom to practice. For example:

Once you say to learners, “Group yourselves”, they will group themselves with friends they socialise best with. In that case, they will do their best in any outdoor play activity. In our school, we sometimes divide learners randomly into groups to check whether they can function in a team they did not choose themselves. Socialisation is important during outdoor play because it helps learners to be freer and more open with those they socialise with.

Barrett (2004) and Collister (2001) argue that learners struggle to socialise when outdoor play is not embedded within the school curriculum. Based on the discussion of the respondents, the researchers concluded that not all learners within the DKKD primary schools are exposed to social activities, which is in contrast with the view of Demers (2008, p. 149) that learners need to be afforded an opportunity for their social development that enhances relationships, independence and pleasure.

Cultural elements integrated into outdoor play

A respondent indicated that assimilation of cultures without cause of conflict does happen among learners: “Multicultural groups participated in the tiny-strings-jumping-in-and-out-game. The less privileged learners are also engaged and it is enjoyed by all because they do that also at their homes.”

Another respondent shared the same view:

In the past, we had a lot of rugby and cricket. The boys will play with and bowl to each other, but there is a shift more to soccer. The whites are struggling because they are not so clever with their feet, but rugby has diminished. Girls still play netball. We do have normal conflict at school and the two black and white cultures have accepted each other. Children enjoy playing without racial conflict. (Teacher respondent)

Cultural integration does happen in schools:

The school is situated in a small remote village. We expect our learners to come to school knowing some games from home. We buy materials such as kgati (skipping ropes) for both girls and boys to use in their games and to stay active. Two learners hold the skipping rope at two ends and the third learner jumps in the middle displaying different techniques of jumping the rope without touching it. If the learner touches it, she/he fails the opportunity of skipping further and another takes up the challenge. (Teacher respondent)

One township school has no equipment and offers little variation in outdoor play, whereby cultural integration cannot be experienced as in the other four schools. This is in contrast with Welford (n.d.) who is of the opinion that outdoor play offers a predominantly “whole person” approach that seeks to engage all aspects of the learner: mind, body and spirit. As stated by respondents, further advantages of cultural integration during outdoor play are the following:

Children play together irrespective of their cultural background. However, in one school, the home language created a problem. The respondent was of the view that the school is English-based and the learners are mostly Setswana-speaking.

They find it hard to interact, but no racism exists. Learners accommodate each other and play with learners from different cultures within the school. In their accommodative nature, the learners learn from each other and teach one another different games from different cultures.

Psychomotor development

In terms of commonality, activities such as leapfrog (69%) and ball handling (81%) during outdoor play (White, 2007; Watkinson, 2010) are prominent activities for physical development taking place during outdoor play in schools. However, it is a matter of concern that such basic activities as leapfrog and playing with are not perceived as an important part of the holistic development of learners according to 24% and 16% of the teacher respondents respectively.

According to interviews, the following physical activities are prominently part of the outdoor programme of primary school learners during breaks: Learners run around and are involved in informal athletics. Boys and girls play soccer and girls play netball and hopscotch is played by all.

Foundation phase learners are actively involved in games like ring-a-ring-a-rosie and hopscotch. However, it was mentioned that the condition for the enjoyment of a game is that the participants should know the rules of the game; "...they should know what they are doing, otherwise, they will be bored."

Through observation, it was found that not all schools can accord learners the opportunity to develop holistically (physical development) Illustrations 4 and 5 confirm this conclusion.



Illustration 4: Learners climbing over self-made frames

Learners in illustration 4 in a rural school use self-made frames for climbing equipment for their physical activities. Illustration 5 shows how learners at another township school, play on loose rocks. There was no supervision by educators and learners play on their own. There is no standard equipment as prescribed by DoE (DoE, 2008) available at these schools. This situation is in contrast with the views of Sheridan (2008) and Gallahue and Donnelly (2003) that learners would fail in developing their motor control, precision and accuracy in the performance of both the learners' fundamental and specialised movements if schools do not equip the playing space with suitable equipment.



Illustration 5: Learners jumping over rocks

Conclusions

The conclusion is based on the research question: How does outdoor play enhance the holistic development of learners in primary schools in NWP?

Respondents in the primary schools in NWP who were involved in the study are aware of the role of outdoor play in the holistic development of learners. Respondents often referred to the role of teachers to guide the learners during outdoor play and to make sure that learners are safe. This view is in contrast with views found in the literature which take the stand that too much involvement of teachers may inhibit free play. The responsibility of the school towards the safety of the child, explains the involvement of the South African teacher.

It was found that the principle of social justice does not prevail in all schools. Outdoor chess is played in only one more affluent school, which before 1994 was a whites-only school. Even the apparatus for outside play was only visible in a few schools. There are still schools where unsafe playing environments exist where learners have to make use of home-made structures and even stones to play on. Although this is an indication of unfair social practice, one has to admire the initiative and creativity of learners to still enjoy their outdoor playtime with found materials.

Opportunities for outdoor play during break time exist at all schools. Thus, learners do get the opportunity to get physically, emotionally and cognitively involved outside the classroom. Social relations develop in a natural way; games like chess and hopscotch stimulate thinking and space for running, and basic apparatus allows the learners to break loose from the restrictions that prevail between the four walls of the classroom.

Most important is that outdoor play assists in preparing learners for later life. It builds their critical skill of self-regulation, which underpins success for a lifetime. They also learn to deal with conflict and they learn to care and to share. An important lesson learned during outdoor play is that no person exists as an island. We need people around us to live to the fullest

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