



Special issue: updates from the journal of outdoor and environmental education publication of volume 26, issue 3

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The *Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education* (JOEE) is produced by Outdoor Education Australia and is strongly supported by the Outdoor Council of Australia with an international reach. JOEE publishes three issues per year and in this update we proudly introduce the latest Special Issue titled *Risky play and learning in the outdoors for educational, developmental, and health purposes* (Vol. 26, Issue 3). In December 2022 we sent a Call for Papers to be included in this Special Issue and were overwhelmed with the number of responses. We now present a collection of nine original articles that offer diverse insights from researchers, educational practitioners, and outdoor/environmental educators from around the globe.

Extant research has found that risk taking supports children and adolescents in developing decision making, problem solving, creativity, self-esteem, and resilience (Gill, 2014; Sandseter, 2010; Sandseter et al., 2021). In essence, the nine papers in this Special Issue explore child and/or adolescent exposure to risk-taking behaviours in the outdoors. Collectively the research examines how the opportunities and access to risky learning spaces (both natural and human-made), are designed and used and whether this encourages children to play, learn, or develop cognitively, socially, or physically. In summary, this Special Issue is devoted to analysing the affordances or constraints of risk taking outdoors.

The **lead article** in this special issue is by Kadriye Akdemir, Çağla Banko-Bal & Serap Sevimli-Celik, and entitled *Giving children permission for risky play: parental variables and parenting styles*. This article outlines the role of parenting styles and decision making as key variables determining a parent's appetite for risky play. A cohort of 302 Turkish parents completed two questionnaires (Risky Play Attitude Scale and the Scale of Parenting Styles). They found overprotective parenting was a critical predictor of risky play, particularly for both low-risk and high-risk play

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scenarios. They call for a better understanding of the triggers, fears, knowledge and skills regarding parenting and risky play.

The **second article**, *Running the risk: The social, behavioral and environmental associations with positive risk in children's play activities in outdoor playspaces* by Janet Loebach, Rachel Ramsden, Adina Cox, Karen Joyce and Mariana Brussoni, highlights the importance of positive risk opportunities in children's play environments. Through risky play, children examine their own capabilities and limits and they posit that there is low probability of serious harm. Their paper investigates factors which influenced risk-taking by examining young children's play behaviours utilizing a behaviour mapping framework. Play behaviours were examined in natural playspaces located in Santa Barbara (USA) and outdoor yards in Vancouver (Canada). It was found that the physical environment was an integral component enabling risky play. As a natural corollary, play space design is tied to positive risk taking.

The **third article**, *"We do it anyway": Professional identities of teachers who enact risky play as a framework for Education Outdoors* by Megan Zeni, Leyton Schnellert and Mariana Brussoni explores how the recent pandemic experience allowed educators to take advantage of moving learning outdoors. Their paper is a participatory action research study, set in Canada. Elementary school teachers described how they took up emergent learning by locating curricular outdoors. Their three findings included; (1) making time and space for unstructured play; (2) student wellness, classroom management, and motivation for curricular learning are of pedagogical value; and (3) with supportive mentorship, teachers can develop the necessary skills and knowledge to enhance opportunities for risky play as a pedagogical approach to outdoor play and learning. The emphasis is on the value of risky play as a pedagogical practice and understanding how teachers navigate systemic challenges in outdoor education.

Marion Sturges, Tonia Gray, Jaydene Barnes and Amanda Lloyd contribute the **fourth article**, titled *Exploring Parent and Caregiver Perspectives of Children's Risky Play in a Nature Park*. Their study investigated the role of adults in supporting children's play and learning in a high risk, bespoke Australian outdoor "nature play park." Insights from parents and caregivers around the benefits and challenges of the park were analysed and they found strong support of children's risky play at this park. The adults noted the park offered children opportunities to (1) engage with the park, (2) be challenged and solve problems, (3) connect to the outdoors, (4) have fun, (5) direct their own play, (6) be physically active, (7) be creative and curious, (8) demonstrate confidence and independence, and (9) build social capacity. The study found that overwhelmingly parents' and caregivers' supported the park and the opportunities for risk it provided.

The **fifth article**, *Play opportunities through environmental design: a strategy for well-being* is by Damien Puddle. He argues for a rethinking of what constitutes play, understanding the value of risky play, and where this play can and should occur. Further, play is positioned as a necessity to meet New Zealand's statutory requirements around well-being. Drawing on Damien's experiences pioneering the first play advocate role, this paper introduces a play case study that led to the development of a novel design approach – Play Opportunities Through Environmental Design. This approach looks to achieve creative city-wide play enablement and demonstrates how

the strategies of government in New Zealand can help children have different kinds of play experiences as supports children to manage their own risk taking.

Recently, China was the first country to detect COVID-19 cases and introduce lockdowns and other restrictions. Since then, it has undergone rapid development in early childhood education and outdoor pedagogy. **The sixth article** titled *Children's access to outdoors in early childhood education and care centres in China during the COVID pandemic* by Junjie Liu, Shirley Wyver, Muhammad Chutiyami and Helen Little examines the changes in children's outdoor time, access to the outdoor space, and restrictions imposed on children's outdoor play. A series of ordinal regression analyses indicated that educators with a higher tolerance of risk in play were more likely to increase children's time spent outdoors and access to outdoor space and impose fewer restrictions on children's outdoor play during the pandemic. Their findings contribute to an ever-growing body of research on how external factors influence opportunities for children to play outdoors and provide directions for future professional development programs and risk-reframing interventions.

The seventh article of the issue is by Umay Hazar Deniz and Nilgün Cevher Kalburan is titled *Comparison of quality and risky play opportunities of playgrounds in Germany*. This paper compares the qualities and affordances of risky play at sixteen different playgrounds in Hamburg, Germany. Eight were urban parks or natural areas and the other eight were neighborhood playgrounds in denser residential zones. Tools used included the 7Cs Scale, which measures playground design quality, and a Risky Play Opportunities Observation Form that categorizes different types of risky play. Although both types of playgrounds offered experiences such as climbing, jumping, and balancing, they found that the green playgrounds typically offered a broader range of affordances for risky play opportunities. Deniz and Kalburan argue for the need to prioritize nature-oriented and risk-enabling playgrounds when considering playground design.

Katie Vander Donk's **eight article**, *Nature play with children under three: a case study study of educator risk taking* concentrates on the professional risk-taking educators engaged in when they execute pedagogical and practice changes. Vander Donk's action research study was undertaken at one urban Australian early learning service which enabled and prioritised regular connection with nature opportunities for infants and toddlers. During the course of the project, young children's opportunities for nature play and community participation was expanded. The article unpacks the theories that influenced collective thinking and informed changes in teaching practice. Furthermore, the complexities of intersecting nature play, place-based pedagogies, education for sustainability, and Indigenous perspectives are examined in relation to infants and toddlers. In conclusion, the research revealed that educator risk-taking is enhanced when change practice is enacted.

The final paper *An infant-toddler outdoor risky play practices in an early childhood centre in Australia* by Gloria Quinones examines outdoor risky play practices in an early childhood centre in Australia. Quinone's study is informed by the Theory of Practice Architectures to analyse outdoor risky play practices. Outdoor risky play practices were analysed through infant-toddlers encounters in the outdoor environment through cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements. The article outlines a four-month research study with infant-toddlers aimed

at exploring how the outdoor environment enables and constrains infants' risky play practices. The findings show that an Infant-toddler's agentic capacities for risky play involve relating by observing peers and risky doings by slowing down on the slide. The professional implications for early childhood educators is that encouragement and support from educators, alongside the provision of a vibrant outdoor environment are key ingredients for risk-taking.

Finally for those academics and practitioners interested in risky play, Springer Nature have an upcoming edited book entitled *The Impact of Risk and Outdoor Play on Children's Learning - Listening, Responding, and Acting on Collective Voices* (Gray, Sturges & Barnes, [forthcoming 2024](#)). This monograph represents a collection of intersecting knowledges and brings together voices which explore risk and outdoor play for children's learning, development and wellbeing. Spanning the international landscape, our book covers the current state of risky play and examines elements of play opportunities, the impact of policy, access to play opportunities, and the design of play spaces. In an era of reduced opportunities for play and in particular risky play, the goal of the book is to be a choir of like-minded advocates to better understand the state of risky play and its potential to foster children's self discovery, creativity, problem solving, curiosity and perseverance.

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Happy reading!

Marion, Tonia, Jaydene and Amanda.

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Marion Sturges is an experienced educator of over 33 years. She has worked extensively across educational sectors, having taught in and been a leader in the tertiary, secondary, primary, and early childhood spaces. Her current role includes leading a team to prepare preservice educators for their professional experience placements. Marion has led and participated in numerous research projects working collaboratively with other researchers and educators. The focus of these projects is working with marginalised members of the community, including children, people with disability, and women to ensure their rights are met and exploring how the place can support or inhibit rights. Her PhD completed in 2021, was undertaken in Early Childhood centres and explored young children's right to participate in place. She is currently also supervising higher degree researchers and has a governance role as Academic Program Advisor at the School of Education, Western Sydney University.

Tonia Gray PhD is a Senior Researcher in the Centre for Educational Research, Western Sydney University. She has been an educator for over 40 years training pre-service teachers for their impending pedagogical career. As a researcher, teacher-educator, and curriculum developer of Outdoor Education and Health/Physical Education, her transdisciplinary research explores human-nature relationships and their impact on health and well-being. Tonia's scholarship includes nature-based learning for health and wellbeing and the intersectional examination of gender leadership and climate justice. She is past Chair of the Australian Tertiary Outdoor Educators Network (2108–2022) and co-editor of the Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education. In 2014 Tonia received the prestigious Australian Award for University Teaching for excellence in outdoor experiential education and in 2019 received the Association of Experiential Education's Distinguished Researcher of the Year. Tonia also was selected on the Homeward Bound Project, a female-only expedition to Antarctica to investigate Climate Change.

Jaydene Barnes has extensive experience as an early childhood/primary educator. Currently, Jaydene works as a lecturer with the School of Education at Western Sydney University. Jaydene's passion are supporting children's literacy and children's play in both the primary school and early childhood context. Her passion aligns with her teaching and research interests with Western Sydney University. Jaydene currently teaches literacy, play and professional experience subjects for both undergraduate and post graduate pre-service educators. She is a current PhD student researching play-based learning in Australian primary schools. Jaydene is passionate about the importance high quality education for all children and indeed the importance of playful learning experiences for their multitude of benefits. Jaydene is a mother of three young children who regularly engage in outdoor play and experienced firsthand the role of the outdoors for children and families in the COVID-19 context within Australia.

Amanda Lloyd is an educator with extensive experience teaching and adventuring outdoors. She has experience as an educator, professional development facilitator, in leadership and advocacy roles. Amanda completed a PhD focused on the advantages of outdoor learning for Primary School students. She has written and presented extensively on outdoor experiences for all. Amanda now combines these experiences to enrich her current role as the Nature Play Development Manager for Greater Sydney Parklands.