

# The 'Glen Outdoor School': The impact and implications of Outdoor Risky Play on the 'Glens' preschool children's holistic growth.

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## Relationship to previous research

Outdoor risky play is a universal activity and a vital medium for learning and building essential life skills. Irish preschool policies have recognised this importance and a strategy for its provision has been managed through Siolta and Aistear.

That said, other policies and adult attitudes, in their efforts to provide safety, have made the delivery of outdoor risky play difficult.

Irish research has also documented a decrease in children's opportunities for outdoor play, be that on the street, within homes or in educational settings (O'Connor, et al, 2014).

## Research Methods

•**Stage one:** In-depth interviews with staff and parents in the Glen Outdoor School setting and Ethnographic participant observation of children in The Glen Outdoor School.

•**Stage two:** In-depth interviews with parents of the children who had attended the Glen Outdoor School and the infant class teacher from the National School. This phase included Ethnographic participant observation of children in The National School setting.



## Research Aims

The research purpose was to gain an understanding of the lived experience of preschoolers from 'Glen Outdoor School'. It sought to establish perspectives on the children's outdoor risky play experiences and gain a deeper understanding *how* this might impact on their lives, subsequent educational experiences and implications of this teaching method on children's holistic growth.

The research aimed to identify developmental, behavioural or attitudinal variation noted by gathering the testimony of parents, childcare workers or teachers of the children as they transition to National school infant class.



## Initial Key Findings

The study highlighted that an 'Outdoor School' philosophy supports positive relationships in all aspects of the children's lives and wider family life.

Initial Key findings comprised of beneficial relationships between:

**Physical development and less health days off** - The parents said that their children attending the 'Glen Outdoor School' were "rarely sick" comparative to their national school attendance.

•**Children's attitudes to the outdoors and nature** - Parents described how their children "were never deterred" or "never complained" about weather conditions, had a 'love' for outdoors, displayed good "safety awareness" and were more likely to be able to "assess a situation".

An interesting comment by the teacher extols this positive relationship, she said that these children were the ones most interested in going 'outside' and 'more into doing things'.

•**The impact of 'risk taking' on creativity, imagination, communication and confidence** -The teacher stated these children were "using their imagination a lot more than others..", "coming up with many ideas..had more get up and go to start or initiate games", "they were well able to speak up in class" and "they were not getting lost in the group".

Each parent enthused about their children's development in this area. In particular they expressed that their child: "...likes to learn and experiment.." "...is good at experimenting and is not afraid to ask questions..".

## The Glen Outdoor School

The 'Glen Outdoor School' has pioneered Irish early learning practice and their attendees benefit from predominantly outdoor risky play. They have overcome numerous obstacles around the provision of risky play such as: legal requirements; HSE expectations; and parental concerns to help enable children to engage freely in outdoor and risky play.

The school's philosophy is to "teach children to be aware of hazards, not cautious of risk and to employ a point of view when assessing play situations".

Principally, the 'Glen Outdoor School' believe children have the right to choose their own experiences and have the pleasure of all the risks and challenges it may present.



## References

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