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## Safety and Risk: Benefits of Outdoor Play For Child Education

(Güvenlik ve Risk: Sınıf Dışı Oyunun Çocuk Eğitimine Katkıları)

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### Abstract

A consideration of the theoretical frameworks of outdoor play between different scholars who emphasised different approaches and points of emphasis to outdoor play reveals a common pattern of consensus as regards the benefits of outdoor play to childhood education, health and development. From Froebel to Smilansky, the variation in points of emphasis between the different theorists does not seem to deter or inhibit the fundamental message of the profound role of outdoor play in childhood education and development. Although play is generally seen in its beneficial values, an added dimension is also given to the 'green' aspects of play which finds a suiting echo in outdoor play. The context of the risk involved in outdoor play in the UK therefore leads us into a consideration of safety and risk within the context of outdoor play in the UK.

**Keywords:** risk, safety, outdoor play, child education.

### Özet

Kuramsal çerçevesi göz önünde bulundurulduğunda sınıf dışı oyun, farklı yaklaşım ve önemli noktaları vurgulayan farklı bilim çevreleri arasında çocuk eğitimi, sağlığı ve gelişime dair ortak bir model ortaya koyar. Froebel'den Smilansky'ye kadar farklı kuramcılarının önem noktaları hakkındaki değişik bakış açıları, sınıf dışı oyunun, çocukluk eğitimi ve gelişimindeki esas rolüne ilişkin temel mesajı azalttığını veya kısıtladığını ifade etmemelidir. Oyunun genel olarak olumlu değerlerinin görülmesiyle birlikte, sınıf dışı oyunda uygun yankı bulan "toy" yönler, oyuna artı bir boyut katmaktadır. Bu nedenle, Birleşik Krallık'daki sınıf dışı oyunda yer alan risk içeriği, güvenlik ve risk üzerinde bizi düşünmeye sevkeder.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Risk, güvenlik, sınıf dışı oyun, çocuk eğitimi

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## **Introduction**

Beyond being a spontaneous and enjoyable activity among young children, play contributes significantly to a child's psychological development (Verenikina et al., 2003) and outdoor play does this in a greater measure. The ways in which play among children achieves this very important feat in the development of children, is a vital aspect of the healthy human society which is little appreciated outside the circles of care, and circles of studies relating to child psychology, development and education. This importance of outdoor play which is well known to early childhood educators (Verenikina et al., 2003) is a worthy area of expository research in the light of factors that affect play such as safety and risk (Sandseter, 2007).

## **Background**

Writing in 2009, Mandy Rose, the Creative Director, Multiplatform in Cymru Wales, raised a number of issues affecting the health of children in the UK. Among the problems enumerated by her as affecting the health, development and wellbeing of children in the UK were obesity and a lack of outdoor play (Osmond & Morris, 2009) where it is stated, '... all the parents and grandparents interviewed believe that children today have lost something that they felt was an important aspect of childhood – the freedom to go out and about to play unsupervised at times.' (Osmond & Morris, 2009, p. 3). This position was echoed earlier in a robust publication by the National Children's Bureau in which the authors were of the strong opinion that today's children in the UK have been brought-up to have no interest in the outdoors (Maudsley & Lester, 2007). This presents a scenario whereby a combination of factors, possibly including the fear of the risks associated with outdoor play, exert such influence in the UK as to relegate outdoor play to the position it appears to have assumed in the past years. This insufficient importance accorded the benefits of outdoor play in the UK provides the background for this research.

## **Statement of the Problem**

To state succinctly, there appears to be a gap between empirical research findings by Morrongiello (2005) and practice, regarding the benefits of outdoor play in the UK. This could be attributed to an overemphasis on the risks of outdoor play. This manifests itself in the results of empirical research carried-out by different researchers in the UK which tend to show that access and opportunities for outdoor play in natural spaces are seriously compromised for children (Moudsley & Lester, 2007). A literature review undertaken by Gleave (2008) showed that many researchers think this way (Gleave, 2008). A more recent (2011) report by the British Toy and Hobby Association lamented the situation of deprivation of the benefits of outdoor play to children in the UK (BTHA 2011). It made reference to the contents of a UNICEF report on the well-being of children around the globe in which the UK was at the bottom of the world's 21 richest countries. The report itself states that 'The United Kingdom and the United States find themselves in the bottom third of the rankings for five of the six dimensions used.' (UNICEF, 2007, p. 3). These parameters which have much in common with play generally, and outdoor play specifically, included; material well-being, health and safety, educational well-being, family and peer relations, behaviour and risks as well as subjective well-being. In this list, educational well-being and peer relations stand-out

as areas where outdoor play is a key factor in promoting child development and education. This point was also made at the 2008 Seminar Proceedings by the Countryside Recreation Network (Fleuret, 2008). The problem therefore, is one of recognising the comparative advantage presented by outdoor play vis-à-vis safety and risk as these affect the development of children in the UK.

### **Objectives of the Research**

In this paper, I aim to do the following:

- To explore the concept of play and outdoor play among children with particular focus on the UK
- To examine and undertake an exposition of the benefits of outdoor play among children with the primary goal of highlighting the comparative advantage of outdoor play even with risk in the UK
- To examine the concepts of safety and risk within the context of outdoor play for children in the UK and the actors that play a role regulating risk and safety

### **Importance/Justification**

The justification for undertaking this research lies in the fact that most writings on child development have somehow been unable to muster the required degree of awareness that will be necessary for parents, guardians and those in charge of children to open up to outdoor play. Even though there have been a good number of writings on the benefits of outdoor play for child development such as ‘A World Without Play’ (BTHA 2011), ‘School Grounds Literature Review (Casey 2003), ‘Children’s Outdoor Play’ (Valentine & McKendrick 1997), ‘Play Wales’ (Gutteridge, 2008) among others, there is the need for more specific research and writings in this direction, and this undertaking is an added effort with the specific aim of exposing the benefits of outdoor play with the hope of creating greater openness and acceptance for the benefit of children in the UK.

### **Hypothesis**

Even though there are considerable concerns bordering on safety of children in outdoor play and the risk of harm and other risks involved, the benefits for children engaged in outdoor play outweighs the concerns. These benefits which are developmental, social, cognitive, psychological and medical are very vital to a meaningful life of optimisation of a child’s potentials. In the context of the UK especially, the concern for safety and risk is not justified by the relatively good and safe atmosphere for children engaged in outdoor play. This position serves as the working hypothesis of this research.

### **Scope of the Study**

The scope of this research covered envisages children below the age of 14 in the UK. This delimitation of substantive scope is vital to the topic of outdoor play since this covers the most vital stages of childhood development, which in turn is the idea at the core of the ‘benefits’ which occupy the core of the hypothesis of this research. An immense proportion of child psychology and development studies focus on this age range, stopping at 14, the eve of young adulthood in the UK.

## **Methodology**

This research adopts a literature based research method. This research method undertakes a qualitative engagement of both quantitative data produced by other researchers as well as a qualitative analytical discourse on the qualitative works of other researchers in the field of child development that addresses outdoor play. The author, I very much desire, to have had the opportunity of engaging in empirical data collection especially through the method used by many experts in the field of child psychology as it affects listening to children and appraising the impact of outdoor play, called the mosaic approach (Clark, 2001). In the face of the practical impossibility of so doing, this work shall engage credible sources and literature authored by experts in outdoor play in the UK. Morrongiello engages with significant empirical data collection in her published papers involving children and parents (Morrongiello et al., 2009; Morrongiello & Mathies, 2007). A similar approach is adopted by a number of writers whose works are used in this research. Froebel's theory of outdoor play and childhood education also harps on the prime importance of outdoor play and contact with nature in child education (Weston, 1998). He is echoed by disciples such as Lady Allen, the champion of outdoor education in the UK.

## **Developmental Benefits of Outdoor Play**

Commenting on the findings of a research conducted in the UK and compiled in 2006, Manwarring and Taylor (2006) stated that 'research into role play and imaginative play in the school environment shows that uninterrupted play benefits children's learning. ... freedom to play in the natural environment contributes to a child's development including their physical and emotional well-being and learning' (Manwarring & Taylor 2006, p. 8).

Commenting on the cognitive benefits of outdoor play, Niklasson and Sandberg (2010) observed that 'children become more involved and show endurance when they receive access to natural environments.' (Niklasson & Sandberg, 2010, p. 487). The cognitive benefits of outdoor play are reflected in the stages of play outlined by Piaget and Smilansky, so that the progress from sensorimotor play to games with rules (Piaget), and from functional to games with rules (Smilansky) are a cognitive development process enhanced by outdoor play. Thus, children engaged in outdoor play are more likely to have greater cognitive development than those not so engaged (Manwarring & Taylor, 2006).

Medically speaking, outdoor play has the benefit of keeping children healthier than if they were not engaged in outdoor play. In a study which looked at the relationship between outdoor play and obesity, Burdette and Whitaker, the researchers made the following recommendation based on their findings: 'In the face of the obesity epidemic, it is intuitive to provide a prescription for parents to turn off the TV and to encourage their children to play outdoors' (Burdette & Whitaker, 2005, p. 661). Recent research has shown that children in the UK have a greater degree of obesity than children in other European countries. Munoz (2009) alludes to other health benefits of outdoor play when she talks of blood pressure and cholesterol levels. She says that children with greater access to outdoor activity have higher levels of physical activity and levels of good health (Munoz, 2009, p.6).

Physical fitness and greater resistance to disease is also associated with the engagements of outdoor play in the UK, decreased levels of physical activity has been linked to the rise of obesity due to what has been described as ‘inequality of access to quality green spaces across the UK’ (Manwaring & Taylor 2006, p. 10). Emotional and psychological well-being is another benefit of outdoor play. In what Thomas & Thompson (2004) have described as ‘letting off steam, shouting and running, quiet reflection, confiding in others and being with family members and pets’ (Manwaring & Taylor, 2006, p.10), outdoor play has been proven to enhance the emotional stability of children and thus, their disposition to learn and engage in the positive application of social skills.

In terms of social skills, outdoor play affords children the opportunity of engaging with their peers in a less formal setting where they are more inclined to engage in spontaneous communication with their peers. This aids social inclusion, formation of social friendships, language development as well as individual and group identity formation (Casey, 2003). A study on play deprivation in 2003 in Wales indicated that children suffering from outdoor play deprivation have repressed emotions and reduced social skills. This makes them to be violent, anti-social and less prolific in communicating than their peers who engage in outdoor play (Hughes, 2003). In addition to this negative effect, outdoor play deprivation also has the effect of producing generally negative play behaviours as opposed to where children are exposed to outdoor play (Maudsley & Lester, 2007). In this context, outdoor play is very beneficial and plays a cardinal role in developing the social skills needed for certain professions requiring a lot of social interactive skills. When it comes to the disabled children, outdoor play has the special benefit of affording friendship opportunities with other children who are not disabled. In this wise, there is a mutual benefit for both the disabled and the non-disabled children through the creation of greater awareness of the idea of difference and the acceptance of people who are ‘different’. It has been shown that the more time disabled and non-disabled children spent together, the more they were likely to interact and play together (Ludvigsen *et al.*, 2005; Manwaring & Taylor, 2006).

These benefits of outdoor play converge to have a positive effect on childhood education as exemplified in the magnificent results produced by the children on whom the idea was used by both Froebel and Montessori. In the case of the later, even those children who were considered ‘defective’ performed above average to the astonishment of many (Faryadi, 2007; Burnett, 1962). The limited allowance given to outdoor play in recent times within the UK would thus seem to deprive children of many of these benefits of outdoor play.

### **Risk, Safety and Play**

Like the definition of play, ‘risk’ defies a unipolar definition and unanimity of the focus in the context of childhood play. One perspective to the definition of risk is exemplified by Boyer, who defines risk as engagement in behaviours that are associated with some probability of negative outcomes (Boyer, 2006). This pattern of risk definition has been criticised for taking a perspective that is too narrow and which ignores the dual nature of risk. This means that the positive aspects of risk have been relegated to the background in defining risk using Boyer’s approach. Little is of the opinion that this depiction of risk is not helpful. She sides with Madge and Barker (2007) who would rather define risk as a concept

encompassing behaviours and activities that can result in both positive and negative outcomes, which are socially constructed and varying from one context to another within and across cultural divides. This perspective to the definition of risk underlies the probabilistic nature of the positives and negatives involved in risky behaviour among children. This makes risk take less of the semblance of a negative danger to be avoided, but a phenomenon requiring management for optimisation of positive results (Ball *et al.*, 2008).

Risky behaviour among children or risky play has been defined to include self-exposure to hazard (Sandseter, 2007, p. 238). More applicable to outdoor play is the perspective which sees risk as ‘attempting something never done before; feeling on the borderline of being out of control-often because of height or speed; and overcoming fear’ (Kaarby, 2004 in Sandseter, 2007 p. 239). Safety is closely related to risk as it embodies the natural inclination to protect children from the negative aspects of risk-taking in play. Of great significance to the discussion on risk and safety in play, are the question and the need for a balance so that children can have the developmental benefits of risk taking in play (which include social, emotional and health needs) (Gleave, 2008). Risk aversion in the UK has been blamed for the continuous shrinking of the spaces for childhood development as the caution culture has dominated social and health policy in the UK (Thom *et al.* 2007). This ‘adult intervention to minimise risk at the expense of childhood experience’ Gill 2007, p. 11), is viewed as inhibitive to proper childhood development, and is replicated in school curriculum in the UK (Gill, 2007, p. 13). In 1997, there was a concern that the negative aspects of risk-taking and outdoor play were on a rise with the increase of teenage gangs, crimes involving children (including murder), alcoholism among others (Gill, 1997). This dilemma of seeking a balance between risk and safety in play is where the purpose of this research is served in attempting to portray the benefits of play and outdoor play in a manner that makes play more attractive unlike the fears of society have tended to affect childhood play in the UK.

### **Outdoor Play and Risk/Safety**

The need for a balance of emphasis between the benefits of outdoor play and risk/safety perception is another area which comes to the fore in this discourse. This is particularly the case within the UK because the ‘risk averse’ perception in society has tended to dominate the airwaves and resulted in the decline of outdoor play.

In making a case for according greater emphasis to outdoor play for children in the UK, one is faced with the task of balancing between risk perception and its reality as this affects outdoor play. A survey of the opinions of the writings of outdoor play advocates like Play Wales and Play England depicts a sense of polarisation between risk perception and reality within the UK. Sandseter thus speaks of the ‘growing debate on the balance between making sure our children are safe versus letting the children play in physically and emotionally stimulating and challenging environments’ (Sandseter, 2007, p. 237). While the debate rages, it would seem that the casualty is felt more on the playgrounds as ‘children’s opportunities for independent play in natural outdoor spaces ... are slowly being eroded’ (Waters & Begley, 2007, p. 365).

While the fear of perceived risks dominates the arena, there appears to be a gap between the reality of risks and the predominant perception. This trend can prove

disadvantageous to the efforts of those who try to promote outdoor play in the UK. This also underscores the urgent need to make efforts aimed at bridging the gap between the real risks to children engaged in outdoor play and the prevalent perception of risk in society. In doing this, it is necessary to address the question of 'the gap'. How extensive is the alleged gulf between risk and risk perception? And what are the practical implications of such a trend in British Society?

Ball talks about a new found interest in accidents and a corresponding drive for safety (Ball, 2007). He attempts to use some figures representing the percentage of restrictions experienced by about 500 children engaged in outdoor play. The survey showed a worrying pattern, where between 23% and 45% of children complained of different degrees of restriction in outdoor play from water to trees to bicycle restrictions. Another study carried-out in North-West England by Valentine & McKendrick showed that up to 85% of parents showed some degree of reservation about the safety of children, some of them expressing concerns about children's safety due to a number of fears including a concern about violent adults, childhood murders, teenage gangs, and juvenile crimes (Valentine & McKendrick, 1997).

As the authors there rightly captured the situation, these factors have been used to fuel adult fears that public space is being overrun by violent and unruly teenagers who are a threat to the personal safety of young children (Valentine, 1996). This has naturally generated the instinct to want to utterly control the spheres of operation of children by their parents. The natural effect of this would be a whittling of outdoor play and engagement with the natural environment for children.

While the popular image captivating the minds of parents is one of danger and risk aversion, the indices of real risk and harm in the last 30 years has actually decreased in the UK. This point is acknowledged by researchers like Valentine who is of the opinion that 30 years ago, the likelihood of children being kidnapped or subject to any of the common risks was higher than it currently is. Ironically however, outdoor play was more prevalent 30 years ago than it is contemporarily- a twist which would seem to hold a rather negative reaction to a positive development for British society (Valentine & McKendrick, 1997; Maudsley & Lester, 2007). In our quest to bring the attention of UK society to the need for greater involvement and allowance for child involvement in outdoor play, this development needs to be placed more persuasively before the public.

Is it not rather curious that while the risk exposure for children involved in outdoor play in the UK declines, it is met with a corresponding decrease in allowances for, and engagement in outdoor play for children in the UK? This lends further credence to the assertion of scholars and observers who say that UK society has placed too much emphasis on risk rather than the benefits of outdoor play and engagement with nature for children in the UK. It goes without say that the natural implication of this trend for the UK is a double jeopardy. This is the case because the immense benefits of outdoor play end-up being denied to children and the larger society while there are really no real reasons for the risk-aversion producing the trend. In addition to the loss of these benefits, there is also the exposure of children to the same risks discussed in relation to the indoors. In seeking to undertake a

'balancing act' between risk perception and actual risk in the UK therefore, this research exposes the need to close the gap between existing risk and how it is perceived. The balance is decisively in favour of allowing children engage in more outdoor play and engagement with the natural environment where this balancing is concerned.

Another key issue relating to outdoor play and risk/safety in the UK relates with safety standards of playgrounds where child outdoor play is allowed in the UK. It is clear that there has been general improvement of playgrounds within the UK in the recent past, even though the situation was not particularly bad. A 2009 release by Norfolk County Council showed that with each improvement of school playgrounds within the county, outdoor play witnessed some positive responses. The release states that 'in a survey of schools who had improved their grounds, 65% reported an improved attitude to learning, 73% an improvement in behaviour and 64 % a reduction in bullying. 84 % of schools noticed improvements in social interaction while 85% reported an increase in health active play' (Norfolk County Council 2009, p. 11).

Without delving deep into an examination of the situation of particular playgrounds in the UK, it suffices to note that the UK has a healthy standard of playground maintenance in the developed world. The implication of this is that there should be a corresponding rise in outdoor play and engagement with the playgrounds. A distinction needs to be made however, between the general notion of outdoor play as a wide construct and outdoor play within school playgrounds as envisaged in the Norfolk case. Regardless of the foregoing point, there is need for research into the reasons why outdoor play has not risen proportionally to the betterment of playground standards in the UK in the recent past. Could it be the same reasons adduced to the points discussed above?

Whatever the reasons for the default in a corresponding rise in engagement with outdoor play and the natural environment in the UK, a consideration of the balance between playground standards and risk favours outdoor play in the UK. A greater sense of awareness is thus needed to enable parents, caregivers and other relevant persons and authorities appreciate this fact and respond accordingly. It would be in agreement with the hypothesis of this study for this fact to be given greater attention so that parents can regain the confidence to afford their children the opportunity of deriving the immense benefits of outdoor play and engagement with the natural environment within the UK.

A third consideration in balancing outdoor play with risk/safety is the question of the unique position occupied by city dwelling parents and their children. In his construction of 'the rural idyll', Valentine presents the image of a relatively safer rural setting, more convenient for outdoor play and engagement with the natural environment (Valentine, 1997). Even though his research shows that many parents contest his assumption of the relative safety of the rural setting for outdoor engagements as contrasted to the urban dwellings, the assumption holds true with many writers. The crowded nature of big cities like London and Birmingham makes the outdoor seem too far and cut-off for children for many reasons including traffic (Mattson, 2002; Franklin & Connolly, 2003) as well as moral and crime panics (Valentine & McKendrick, 1997; Maudsley & Lester, 2007).



Adult attitude towards children in relation to space is not exactly a cordial one because of the contrasting desire for ‘disorder’, ‘loose materials’ on the part of children, and the desire for ‘safety’ and ‘order’ on the part of adults (Thompson & Philo, 2004; Maudsley & Lester, 2007). This necessarily implies that the more space there is in a city, the less will be the likelihood of contact and ‘conflict of interests’ between adults and children. Moreover, it is logical that parents and caregivers would keep a closer watch, and thus accord less freedom to children in crowded urban settings than in rural settings as reflected in the views of Valentine (1997) and other writers (Morrongiello, 2005).

In the circumstances, it would be quite in order to fall back to enclosed play spaces in schools and parks dedicated for the purpose. In this regard, the immense benefits of engagement with the natural environment can be simulated through a recreation of the features of the natural environment in such controlled play settings. In this respect, it has been argued by Freeman (1995) that play spaces designed by adults often neglect the inclusion of less formal play spaces, especially the natural features of the outdoor (Freeman, 1995). Munoz proposes a remedy to this situation through the intentional inclusion of natural outdoor features in addressing the situation of deteriorating play spaces for children in the UK. This twist to the discourse reveals the greater levels of access to ‘wild spaces’ enjoyed by children residing in rural areas (Munoz, 2009).

In trying to strike a balance between the need to allow children in the UK greater access to the benefits of outdoor play, the unique situation of children residing in urban areas presents a unique obstacle which may not be so easy to wish away. It would be out of place to argue that the populated urban centres are places where children can be ‘let off’ with the same degree of ease as the rural areas. In pushing the argument made in this research against this obstacle, the modified stance of opting for the enhancement of ‘enclosed’ play spaces is taken. It would not be herculean to opt for enhancement of these play spaces to include as much natural outdoor features as possible on a long term cost-benefit consideration. This would serve to afford children the opportunity to develop those skills and competencies which thrive in the outdoor to a considerable degree as advocated by Lady Marjoren Allen between the 1940s and the 1960s in relation to UK urban settings.

This compromise position is peculiar to the populated urban centres which are most prone to denying children the opportunity to engage in outdoor play- and the corresponding threat of obesity and the other negatives associated with play and outdoor play deprivation. It would also be in order to suggest that parents with the means and ability should not hesitate to take their children to places where they can engage with the outdoor for some considerable length of time.

### **Outdoor Play and Regulation**

In calling for greater involvement/engagement in outdoor play for children below 14 in the UK, it is also necessary to briefly consider the role played by policy and regulation and how this affects outdoor play for children in the UK. The key question is, does play regulation enhance or inhibit the degree of engagement in outdoor play for children in the UK? A research by Little in relation to six Early Childhood centres showed the relationship between regulation, risk and engagement in outdoor play. She argues that ‘factors such as the Early

Childhood (EC) regulatory environment, high child-staff ratios, poor outdoor environments, fear of litigation and an inadequate understanding of the benefits of risk-taking contribute to minimisation of opportunities for risk-taking play' (Little 2009, p. 1). Can the same or similar assertion be made of the UK regulatory environment? Our examination of the regulatory environment in the UK does not directly suggest a negative impact on outdoor play of itself. If anything, the regulatory framework is structured to encourage play by guaranteeing safety. The results are however contrary to this expectation and regulatory posturing.

Article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child specifically provides that '1. State parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and arts. 2. State parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully... and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for ... recreational and leisure activity' (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). This convention was signed by the UK in 1990 and ratified in 1991, and the UK has generally been compliant. Ball talks of the difficulty in imagining that anyone would wish to impede children from participation in play activities in view of this regulatory posturing (Ball, 2007).

Regulation *per se* does not derogate from engagement in outdoor play, except for the reaction of those involved as parents and caregivers. It could however be posited that the fear of litigation plays a role in determining the level of engagement in outdoor play in the UK. This much is implied by Ball (2007) as well as the predominant diction used by RoSPA in its publications. Also, in the absence of any particularly distinctive trend of litigation against playground administrators in the UK, the trend of decline in outdoor play in the UK cannot be justified on the basis of the fear of litigation- nevertheless Ball thinks this fear still plays a role in affecting responsiveness to outdoor play where litigation is concerned (Ball, 2007). The quest for a balancing between regulation and outdoor play would therefore appear to be displaced to the realm of perception and supervision by parents, caregivers and playground administrators.

It can be argued that children are made to suffer deprivation of the immense benefits of outdoor play on the unfounded fears of the regulatory framework aimed at promoting play. It should be stated however, that further research is required to establish more specifically, the impact of the UK regulatory framework on engagement in outdoor play in the UK. The resources available to us are not sufficient to conclude that the regulatory framework does not exercise an influence on outdoor play in a way that diminishes allowance for children to engage with the natural environment.

In attempting to address the need to allow children greater engagement with the outdoors in the face of regulation, it is safe to state that uncertainties in dealing with the law are not sufficient deterrents to allowing children to engage in outdoor play. The over cautious and risk-averse disposition of the society to outdoor play for children therefore comes across as more harmful to the developmental needs of children in the UK. The balance therefore tilts more towards allowing children to engage in outdoor play in the natural environment and credible alternatives where this is unavailable as in the case of populated urban settings.

## **Recommendations**

From my critical engagement with the literature, I argue that I argue that three interconnected aspects of policy and practice need to be considered:

- balanced perception on risk
- better understanding of risk through accessible documentation and policy
- improved policy development so that outdoor play is more actively promoted and even statutory

1. **Balanced Perception on Risk: Balanced Publicity on Risk:** I believe it would be profoundly helpful to encourage balanced publicity on risk and benefits of outdoor play by agencies and bodies which make publications relating to outdoor play. An example would be the RoSPA in its website. If the alarming publications on risk (which are usually accompanied with harrowing tales of fatalities) are balanced by an accompanying column on the true statistical representation of reality in terms of the benefits of outdoor play, I believe this will serve to give parents, caregivers and other stakeholders a more balanced perspective from which to make judgments on granting allowance to outdoor play and engagement with the natural environment for their children.

2. **Better Understanding of Risk:** I propose that there should be a purposeful effort aimed at making greater publicity on the profound benefits of outdoor play. This recommendation goes a step further than the conventional publicity to propose that steps be taken to introduce a policy of painstakingly ensuring that special 'easy to read' publications are made accessible to parents, caregivers and education regulators to ensure that the benefits of outdoor play are not crowded out by the robust media culture of the century.

3. **Improved Policy Development:** Finally, I would recommend that steps be taken to introduce laws that would support the quest to allow children engage in outdoor play and be allowed access to the natural environment in the UK. This law could be crafted in such a way as to embrace the existing loop-holes in the field. This recommendation is informed by the fact that existing regulation affecting play and outdoor play probably has more of a restrictive effect on the degree of engagement in outdoor play and contact with the natural environment.

## **Conclusion**

Should children in the UK be allowed greater access to outdoor play and play in natural spaces? This research answers in the positive. It can be shocking that the immense benefits of outdoor play are dwarfed by the fear of risk and concern for safety in the UK. If the theorisations and struggles for outdoor play over the course of a century in the UK is to have its legacy upheld, then it is important at this point to bring to public view, the immense benefits of outdoor play and engagement with the natural environment for children so as to 'cut the fear of risk' to the real proportions it truly represents in the particular case of the UK. If denying children of a chance to encounter nature robs them of life's essence (Munoz, 2009), then perhaps it is time to raise the bars in the UK and secure a healthier, happier and more productive future by letting the children out once more.

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