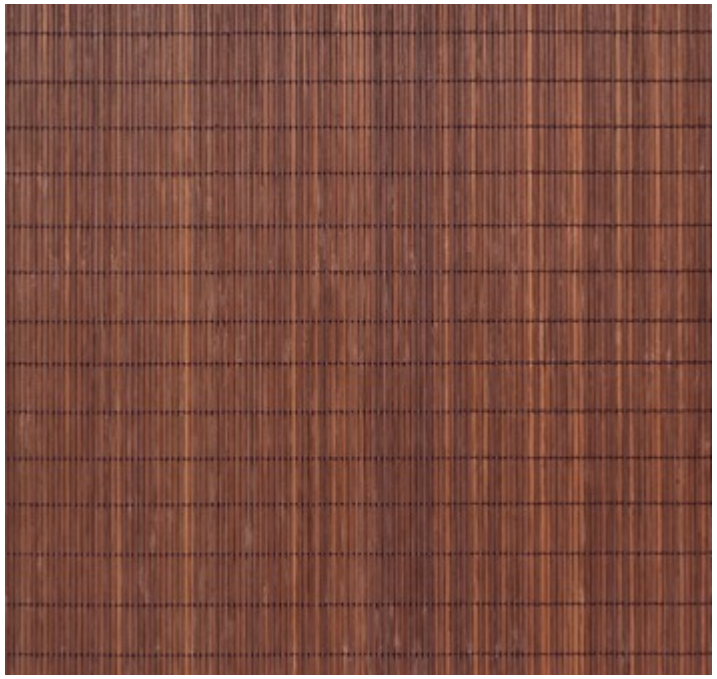
Considerations for Play

Staffing for an outdoor curriculum



According to attachment theory, the caregiver must be available and sensitive to the child's support needs.

The interaction between caregiver and child is two-sided; the child's signals are confirmed by the caregiver or teacher, and there is reciprocity in the interactions.

The early neuroscience breakthrough reminds us that a key job of childcare is to give children new things to love.

It reminds us that what caregivers really teach is themselves .

It reminds us that children learn from people they love.

Teacher work

"Teacher work" is what caregivers call the work they do while children play. Children are welcome to share in this work if they choose.

Participating in "teacher work" (the daily chores) is a time for children to feel a part of their community and take pride in helping and contributing. These activities are often a nice break for children to do with a teacher and or with a close friend.

In a safe and conducive environment, children are capable and creative enough to engage themselves in a variety of activities, including the risky ones. Caregivers should recognize their capability and let the children try out activities they invent. If they attempt risky activities, the adult can monitor the situation to ensure safety.

Although children are believed to have the competence to control their play, it is not uncommon to see adults unknowingly or unintentionally interrupt children's play with arguably inappropriate requests.

Direct involvement of caregivers in young children's play can have a negative impact on children's play engagement . Therefore, caregivers are found to disturb children's engagement with objects and peers by being too directive without responding to the children or by being intrusive and taking over children's initiatives.

Interruptive effects of adult's involvement and reaction to children's play:

- Children are competent interpreters of their situations, and we should set them free to make choices and decisions, self-regulate, or to make and break the rules as they learn from their own hands-on experiences.
- The mismatch between the child's and the adult's perspective brings an interruption of the play.

The positive impact of solitary play on learning

Solitary play helps children develop their creativity, problem solving skills, and ability to be alone.

Learning to be comfortable playing alone allows them to build upon their interests and strengths.

- Children may engage in solitary play at times when they wish to observe how others engage in a particular task or activity. The learning that occurs through their observations may become part of their plan as to how to tackle a new experience.

Environmental Considerations

Outdoor space can be dynamic and supportive

A goal we have when designing an outdoor space is to have smaller, sectioned off areas that act as special places for small groups of children to play in together.

Integrated learning happens outside easily

Outdoor play environments provide children with new words, reasoning skills and cognitive strategies.

Challenging outdoor play opportunities increase children's fine motor skills, their ability to reason and make appropriate judgments, and use their creativity to support their ideas and perspectives.

When language, movement, and self-regulation skills are combined, children can focus and control their behaviors, so they can problem solve and work with their peers.

Children require environments where they can engage in outdoor play that build upon both their fine and gross motor development. Construction play, games, and physical motion including pushing, pulling, stretching upwards and downwards, climbing, squatting, and speed are essential for physical activity.

Running, jumping, swinging, climbing and moving bodies in unique ways contribute to children's physical development. When children are engaged in play that requires them to use their bodies in big body play, they are learning about reflexes, movement control, how to balance, and how to manage their bodies within the space.

More research speaks to the importance of motor development in children under the age of five. Walking along uneven terrain is said to be one of the most beneficial experiences for children developing coordination, balance, and body control.

- While we always aim to have natural play materials that blend in with the natural landscape, some of the materials will have specific purposes that target specific skills. Although our balance beam is often used in creative play or as a resting place, it is also used to enhance balance. It takes practice and perseverance however, two skills that will be critical for early learning in kindergarten.

- We are grateful for the variety of weather and seasons that we have access to in Maine. Going out on a rainy day is often when children are most engaged in investigations because there are so many new phenomena on the play yard.

Considering curriculum

When children play outside the cognitive benefits are tremendous

- In outdoor play, children practice planning and executing ideas.
- They experience making a guess about something and then trying it out — *if I drop this pebble into that puddle, how high will it splash? Will I get wet?*
- Children acquire an intuitive understanding of scientific method. Later, when it is taught inside their elementary school classroom, children who have these experiences have a head start understanding concepts.

Intrinsic vs. extrinsic learning

Outdoor play environments provide children with time, materials, and opportunities to exercise the core of their daily experiences: their sense of curiosity, their questions, ideas, observations and discoveries.

The National Science Foundation (2001) suggests that active learning involves a process of exploring the natural or material world and triggers questions leading to discoveries and a new level of understanding.

Through active exploration children seek information and insight about their questions and interests in things that matter to them. They construct meaning and resolutions about their area of curiosity rather than being focused on the right answer.

Active exploration contributes to intrinsic learning

- During outdoor play, curious children may tinker with materials and ideas when they first begin to determine how to crack ice, splash in a puddle, or make a den or a shelter.
- Tinkering can be described as an active engagement and manipulation with materials or experiences that children do to figure out ideas and answers to questions.
- Tinkering with ideas supports children exploring, experimenting, engaging with materials in ways that offer new options and ultimately learning through trial and error.
- When children are given the time, space, and materials to combine, assemble, take apart, and create with; they become immersed in experimentation and discovery that increases their desire to further explore.

Concrete experiences lead to abstract thought

For example, playing with containers, a child learns about conservation of matter, this can only be learned through the accumulation of concrete experiences.

It is more difficult to teach older children how to calculate the volume of a three- dimensional object if they have not had adequate experience playing with matter: sand, water, or snow.

"Loose parts" appear spontaneously outside

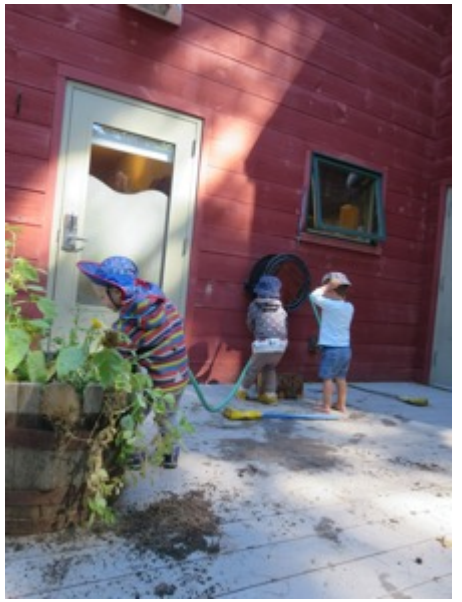
- Nicholson (1971) coined the term loose parts theory to articulate the idea that children benefit from being given open-ended materials. This means that the materials may be used alone or with other materials. They are movable and do not have a defined use; rather children may use them in a variety of ways.
- Loose parts do not have specific instructions of how the product needs to be used. Through exploration and manipulation of the materials, children figure out how they can be combined, redesigned, taken apart and put together in multiple ways.
- When materials do not have a specific purpose children feel invited to be curious about the items in their environment and then *mess about* with them.

Social development occurs more naturally in outdoor environments

- Because of peer play, the space and options to move, create, and explore occur more spontaneously in outdoor play.
- This is where children learn to take turns, self-regulate, interact with peers, and understand social norms such as what behaviors are acceptable and what ones require refinement.
- They determine when to engage in group play options and when they wish to be alone and enjoy solitary play.

Cooperative play

Children work collaboratively and creatively to construct a plan and then enjoy it. They will use materials and loose parts in their building. Observing this collaboration highlights the benefits of open-ended, uninterrupted play where the child's agenda is foremost, and the caregiver is not involved.



Scholars have discussed children’s rights and participation from various perspectives and one way of manifesting their right and proper participation in a program activity is by listening to them and understanding their verbal and nonverbal cues.

Planning and Intentionality

- Shifting from our role as a teacher outside is supervisor and manager to our role as a teacher outside is scaffolder and facilitator shifts how you plan, prepare and conduct yourself outside with children.
- The outdoor environment requires the same planning and preparation that the indoor classroom requires
- It is not a matter of simply bringing the indoors out, it is a separate dialogue and conversation

Observation as a means to building curriculum

- Presence and observation is our number one tool and starting place for building an outdoor curriculum
- Caregivers look, listen and engage with the environment themselves in order to build curriculum
- Notes are taken, questions are asked, and the team engages in dialogue about what they are seeing for play, social dynamics and

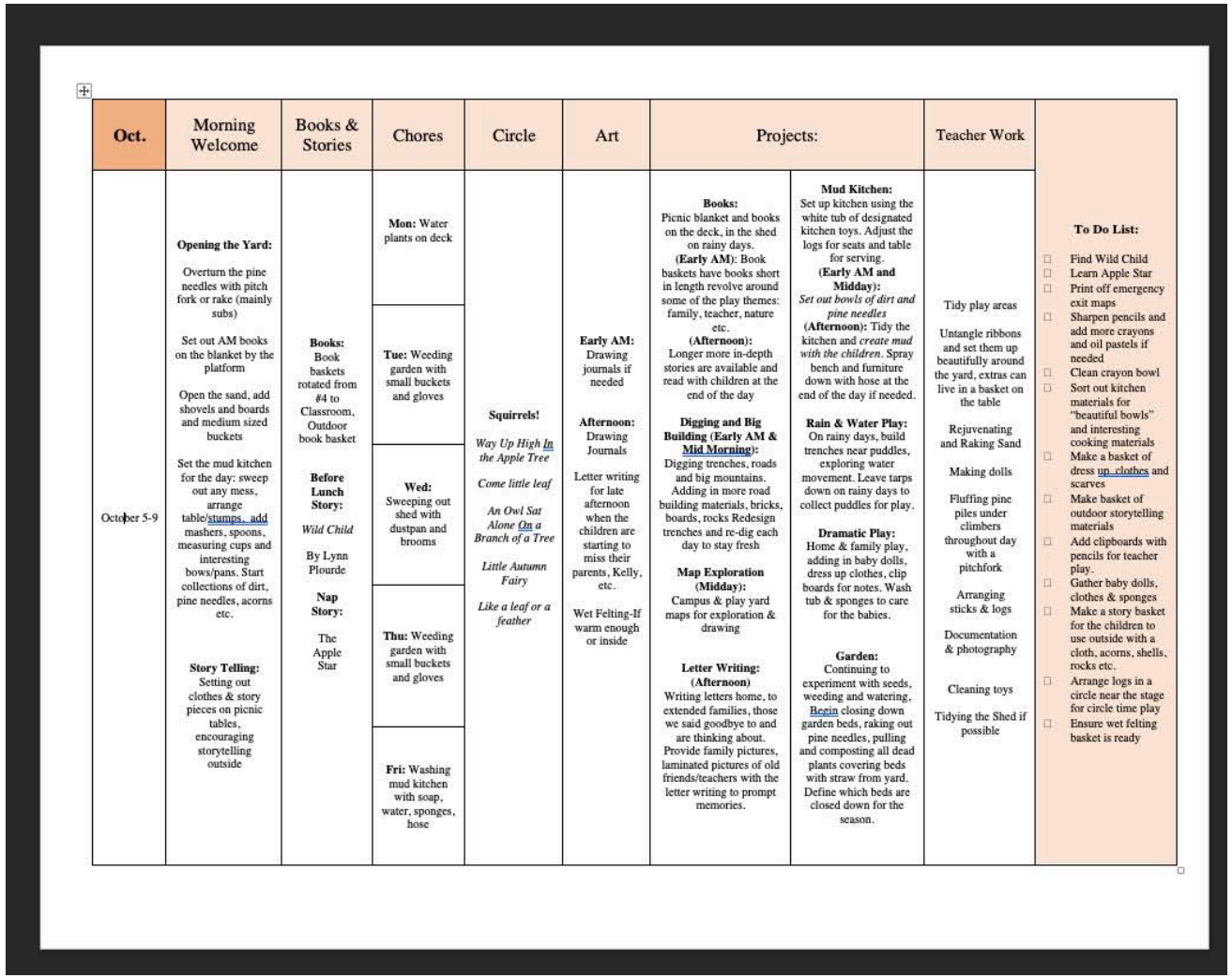
Weekly Planning

Make time for conversations and planning or develop a system of sharing observations and next steps

Always starts with play observations; includes re-visiting projects that last for multiple weeks

Includes both how to extend the children's play but also what work teachers are taking on outside on the yard

Meets individual child's needs; important for children who are developing an appreciation for the outdoors at different rates



Oct.	Morning Welcome	Books & Stories	Chores	Circle	Art	Projects:		Teacher Work	
October 5-9	**Opening the Yard:** Overturn the pine needles with pitch fork or rake (mainly subs) Set out AM books on the blanket by the platform Open the sand, add shovels and boards and medium sized buckets Set the mud kitchen for the day: sweep out any mess, arrange table/stumps, add mashers, spoons, measuring cups and interesting bows/pans. Start collections of dirt, pine needles, acorns etc. **Story Telling:** Setting out clothes & story pieces on picnic tables, encouraging storytelling outside	**Books:** Book baskets rotated from #4 to Classroom, Outdoor book basket **Before Lunch Story:** *Wild Child* By Lynn Plourde **Nap Story:** The Apple Star	**Mon:** Water plants on deck **Tue:** Weeding garden with small buckets and gloves **Wed:** Sweeping out shed with dustpan and brooms **Thu:** Weeding garden with small buckets and gloves **Fri:** Washing mud kitchen with soap, water, sponges, hose	**Squirrels!** *Way Up High In the Apple Tree* *Come little leaf* *An Owl Sat Alone On a Branch of a Tree* *Little Autumn Fairy* *Like a leaf or a feather*	**Early AM:** Drawing journals if needed **Afternoon:** Drawing Journals Letter writing for late afternoon when the children are starting to miss their parents, Kelly, etc. Wet Felting-If warm enough or inside	**Books:** Picnic blanket and books on the deck, in the shed on rainy days. **(Early AM):** Book baskets have books short in length revolve around some of the play themes: family, teacher, nature etc. **(Afternoon):** Longer more in-depth stories are available and read with children at the end of the day **Digging and Big Building (Early AM & Mid Morning):** Digging trenches, roads and big mountains. Adding in more road building materials, bricks, boards, rocks Redesign trenches and re-dig each day to stay fresh **Map Exploration (Midday):** Campus & play yard maps for exploration & drawing **Letter Writing: (Afternoon)** Writing letters home, to extended families, those we said goodbye to and are thinking about. Provide family pictures, laminated pictures of old friends/teachers with the letter writing to prompt memories.	**Mud Kitchen:** Set up kitchen using the white tub of designated kitchen toys. Adjust the logs for seats and table for serving. **(Early AM and Midday):** *Set out bowls of dirt and pine needles* **(Afternoon):** Tidy the kitchen and *create mud with the children*. Spray bench and furniture down with hose at the end of the day if needed. **Rain & Water Play:** On rainy days, build trenches near puddles, exploring water movement. Leave tarps down on rainy days to collect puddles for play. **Dramatic Play:** Home & family play, adding in baby dolls, dress up clothes, clip boards for notes. Wash tub & sponges to care for the babies. **Garden:** Continuing to experiment with seeds, weeding and watering, Begin closing down garden beds, raking out pine needles, pulling and composting all dead plants covering beds with straw from yard. Define which beds are closed down for the season.	Tidy play areas Untangle ribbons and set them up beautifully around the yard, extras can live in a basket on the table Rejuvenating and Raking Sand Making dolls Fluffing pine piles under climbers throughout day with a pitchfork Arranging sticks & logs Documentation & photography Cleaning toys Tidying the Shed if possible	**To Do List:** ☐ Find Wild Child ☐ Learn Apple Star ☐ Print off emergency exit maps ☐ Sharpen pencils and add more crayons and oil pastels if needed ☐ Clean crayon bowl ☐ Sort out kitchen materials for "beautiful bowls" and interesting cooking materials ☐ Make a basket of dress up clothes and scarves ☐ Make basket of outdoor storytelling materials ☐ Add clipboards with pencils for teacher play. ☐ Gather baby dolls, clothes & sponges ☐ Make a story basket for the children to use outside with a cloth, acorns, shells, rocks etc. ☐ Arrange logs in a circle near the stage for circle time play ☐ Ensure wet felting basket is ready

Planning for Infants through Preschool Age Children

- Intentional and thoughtful planning is critical for all ages and programs
- Each of our teams observes children's play and development, intentional plans for extending their play and skills
- Each of our team plans and engages in conversation for how they will interact with the environment, scaffold children's learning and have a presence outdoors

“Risk is essential to childhood”

There are short-term and long-term effects for children who do not experience risk-taking.

- When risk-taking is limited, children will create ways to challenge themselves. This can result in an increase of unsafe risk, a lack of desire to engage in curious, creative and challenging play; and the lost opportunity to build confidence, judgment, competence, and self-esteem through kinesthetic and physical play.
- One of the long-term outcomes of limited risk-taking is children who do not experience the lessons and learning gained from risk-taking when it is either positive or unsuccessful, and who will show poorer risk judgement in the future.

Children become risk-familiar in outdoor play

When outdoor environments are rich with opportunities for calculated risk-taking, they offer children opportunities for climbing, running, using hammers, stones, logs, and stumps, and engaging in rough-and-tumble play with others.

There are invitations for children to "disappear", "get lost" or explore on their own.

Risk perception is like a muscle that needs to be developed and flexed.

Exposure to healthy risk, particularly physical, enables children to experience fear, and learn the strengths and limitations of their own body.

Society's risk-averse attitude to young people's lives affects everything from school-based activities to the design of play areas, where eliminating any potential danger or cause for future litigation is the highest goal.

Encourage the toddler to poke around under hedges and permit preschool children to leave your sight in a safe area.



Parents and caregivers need to work together to give children real childhoods where scrapes and grazes, falls and panic are normal.

Will my child be ready for school?

- We know that brain development is at the core of all aspects of development.
- Studies have shown that outdoor play influences a child's neurological development as the neural circuits of the brain become wired.
- Children who are exposed to outdoor environments move physically, participate in exploratory experiences such as putting things together and taking them apart, figure out how to accomplish goals: make sand molds, climbing to the top of the stump, etc. These experiences contributes to the critical thinking and problem-solving skills used later in academic environments.