



Rethinking risk: making space for outdoor play


Dr Mariana Brussoni

<https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2016/02/22/kids-ask-adults-to-back-off-give-them-freedom-to-fall-down-make-mistakes.html>

mbrussoni@bcchr.ubc.ca

+1-604-875-3712

brussonilab.ca

 [mbrussoni](https://twitter.com/mbrussoni)

 [PlayOutsideUBC](https://www.instagram.com/PlayOutsideUBC)

BC INJURY research and prevention unit


BC Children's
Hospital
Research Institute



Outline:

What, Why and How of Outdoor Play & Risk

- What is it?
- Why is it important?
- How do we support it?
 - Attitudes
 - Design



What was your childhood like?

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Photo: Angela Roy

Why outdoor play?



Benefits of Outdoor & Risky Play

Play is the
engine of
optimal child
development



Brussoni (2019) Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development

© M. Brussoni, 2019

Photo: Matthew T. Rader

A young child wearing a green winter coat and blue pants is standing in a snowy field. The child is reaching up with their right hand towards a single orange leaf that is falling from the sky. The background is a soft-focus, snowy landscape with trees and a path. The overall scene is peaceful and captures a moment of connection with nature.

Access to Nature:
Change & Challenge
Stress-buffering
Attention restoration
Self-regulation
Environmental awareness

Brussoni (2019) Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development

Photo by Kobby Mendez

© M. Brussoni, 2019

What is childhood like now?

KIDS ACTIVITY - THEN



AND NOW



What is risky play?



... thrilling & exciting forms of play involving uncertainty and the chance of physical injury



Photo: Michal Janek



Photo: M. Brussoni



Photo: A. Templeman-Kluit



Photo: Michael Aleo




Photo: Mi Pham



© M. Brussoni, 2019

Photo: Abigail Grull

A young child with brown hair, wearing a bright green t-shirt, is leaning over a dark wooden table. The child is looking down at a tablet computer lying flat on the table, with their right index finger pointing at the screen. The background is slightly blurred, showing a window with white blinds. A semi-transparent grey box with white text is overlaid on the center of the image.

“We are in the midst of a
silent play emergency”
Real Play Coalition, 2018

Photo: Hal Gatewood

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The Biggest Risk is
**KEEPING KIDS
INDOORS**

2015

The ParticipACTION Report Card on
Physical Activity for Children and Youth



PARTICIPACTION

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POSITION STATEMENT ON ACTIVE OUTDOOR PLAY

Position



Access to active play in nature and outdoors—with its risks—is essential for healthy child development. We recommend increasing children’s opportunities for self-directed play outdoors in all settings—at home, at school, in child care, the community and nature.



OutdoorPlayCanada.ca

Pan-Canadian Public Health Network

Partners in Public Health



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[Home](#) > [Reports and Publications](#) > [Active Outdoor Play Statement from the Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health](#)

Active Outdoor Play Statement from the Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health

The Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health (CCMOH) Statement supports and endorses the [Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play](#)¹ developed by a coalition of organizations in 2015, which states:

"Access to active play in nature and outdoors-with its risks-is essential for healthy child development. We recommend increasing children's opportunities for self-directed play outdoors in all settings-at home, at school, in child care, the community and nature."

The position statement was informed by the best available evidence, interpreted by a group of Canadian experts representing 14 organizations, and reviewed and edited by more than 1,600 stakeholders.² The position statement applies to girls and boys (ages 3-12 years) regardless of ethnicity, race, or family socioeconomic status. Children who have a disability or a medical condition should also enjoy active play with guidance from a health professional.

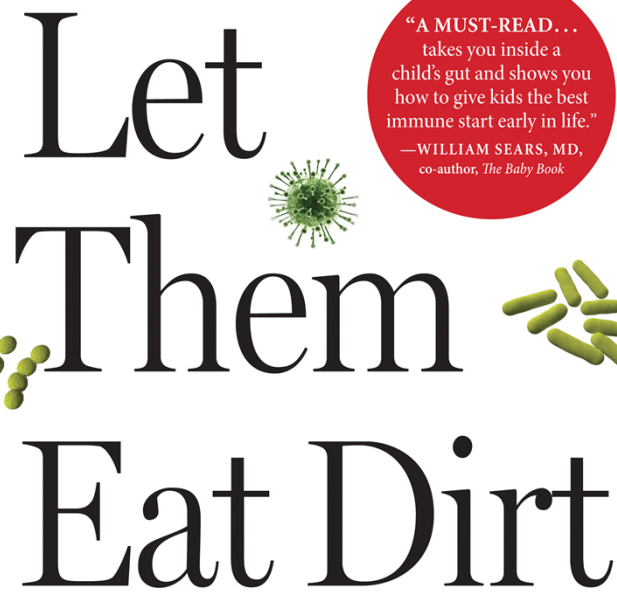
OutdoorPlayCanada.ca

Portrait of a Canadian 12-year old

Canadian children today are taller, heavier, fatter, rounder, weaker, less flexible, and less aerobically fit than in 1981



U.10	Waist-to-hip ratio	U.10
	FITNESS TESTS	
43 kg	Grip strength	40 kg*
32.0 cm	Sit-and-reach	28.2 cm*

The cover features several illustrations of microscopic organisms. At the top, there are green, rod-shaped bacteria. To the right of the word 'Them' is a green, spherical virus with spikes. Below 'Them' are more green, rod-shaped bacteria. To the right of the word 'Eat' are several green, spherical bacteria. Below 'Dirt' is a green, rod-shaped bacterium with a flagellum. At the bottom right, there is a cluster of green, spherical bacteria.

Let Them Eat Dirt

"A MUST-READ...
takes you inside a
child's gut and shows you
how to give kids the best
immune start early in life."
—WILLIAM SEARS, MD,
co-author, *The Baby Book*

Saving Your Child
from an
Oversanitized World

B. BRETT FINLAY, PhD AND
MARIE-CLAIRE ARRIETA, PhD

© M. Brussoni, 2019

Children urged to play outdoors to cut risk of shortsightedness

Research reveals link between environmental factors and rising cases of myopia



**Children need
3+ hours daily
outdoor time**

Ian Morgan, Australian
National University

theguardian



1.2 million
Canadian children
& youth are
affected by
mental illness

Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2018

© M. Brussoni, 2019

1:4 Canadian kindergarten children are developmentally vulnerable:

- Communication skills & general knowledge
- Emotional maturity
- Physical health & well-being
- Social competence
- Language & cognitive development

Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2014

© M. Brussoni, 2019

Photo: Annie Spratt





What happened to play?

Wyver; Carson & Predy; Gill; Dietz & Kashin, (2019)
Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development

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What are we afraid of?



Stranger Danger

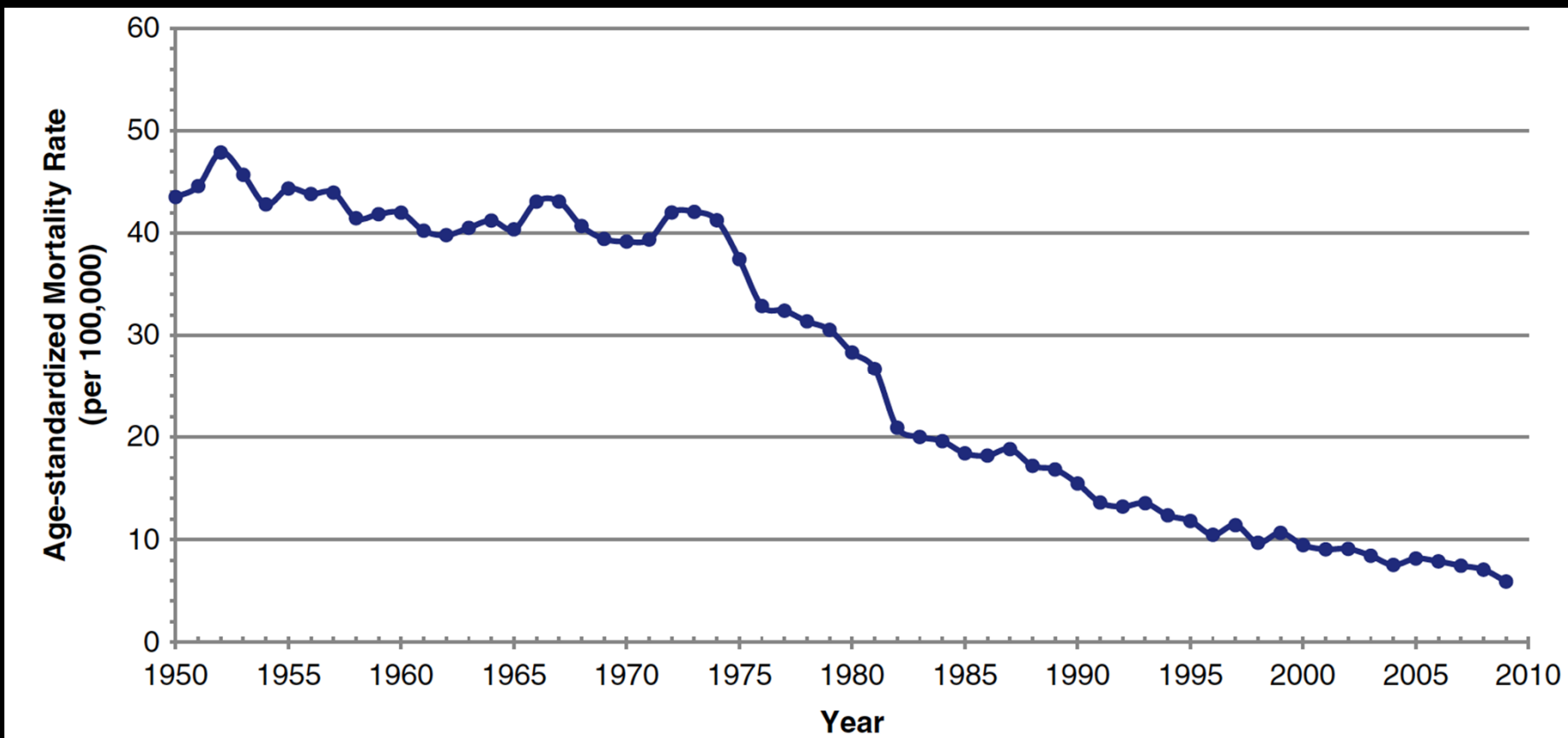
Risk of abduction by a stranger
in Canada: **≈1:14,000,000**

Dalley & Ruscoe, 2003

Leave child unattended
for **200,000 years**

Warwick Cairns

Canadian mortality rates for all unintentional injuries, ages 0-19 years (1950-2009)



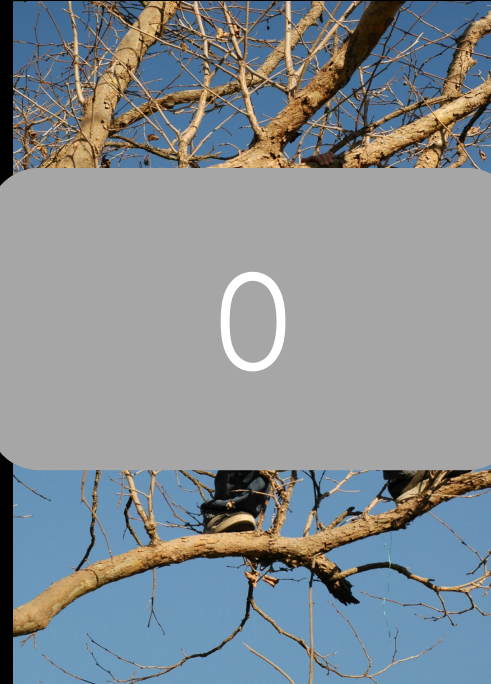
Richmond et al., 2016, CJPH, 107(4-5), e431-7 © M. Brussoni, 2019
© M. Brussoni, 2019

Outdoor Play-related Fall Injuries

Death rate for fall from play equipment, ages 1-14, (2007-2017)



Death rate for fall from tree, ages 1-14, (2000-2017)



Injury by Exposure Time

Systematic review

Medically treated injuries, ages 6-12 years:

- Active commuting
- Sports participation
- Leisure time (recreation, play)

Injury by Exposure Time

Systematic review

Medically treated injuries, ages 6-12 years:

- Active commuting: 0.15-0.52/1000 hours
- Sports participation: 0.20-0.67/1000 hours
- Leisure time: 0.15-0.17/1000 hours

A child would need to play 3 hours/day for \approx 10 years

Risk Management Skills:
Keeping kids safe means
letting them take risks

© M. Brussoni, 2019

Photo: Stephen Isaiah



A photograph of a child running on a sandy beach at low tide. The child is in the foreground, running towards the left. The beach is wide and sandy, with gentle waves lapping at the shore. In the background, there is a line of trees and a clear sky with some clouds. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

How do we bring back play?

Childhood: For best results, use outdoors.
www.childnature.ca

© M. Bruschi, 2011

Outdoor Play Supportive Environments



Photo: Mi Pham

OUTSIDEPLAY.ca

Take a risk, go play outside!

An online tool to help parents and caregivers gain the confidence to allow their kids to engage in more outdoor play.



Click to watch video!



BC INJURY research and prevention unit



Already know what Risky Play is and want to get started?

[Start Journey](#)



Welcome to the Outdoor PLAYbook

Thinking outside the classroom: transforming Canadian schoolyards into dynamic environments for learning, growing and playing.

As a "How-To Guidebook," the Outdoor PLAYbook offers a selection of leading research and best practices for school grounds in the following areas: landscape architecture, sustainable design, economic and phasing strategies, child development, injury prevention, and outdoor educational opportunities.

Please note that any design decisions are subject to approval by your local school authority, such as the Vancouver School board, and the images and projects shown are for inspirational purposes only.

The Outdoor PLAYbook is an ongoing research project, and is continually being adapted and refined. If you have suggestions or comments, we would love to hear them.



Who is this site for?



Who we are and what we do



Getting Started



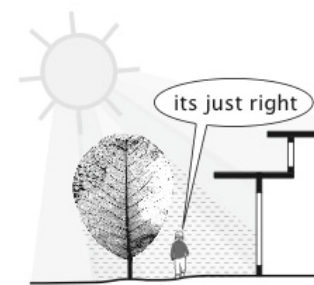
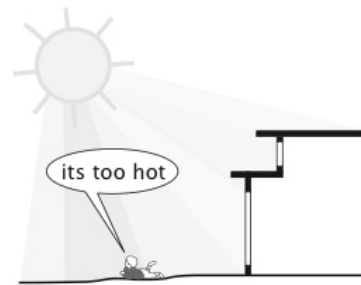
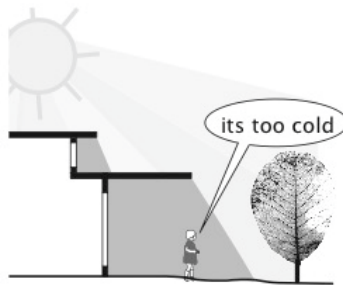
OutdoorPlayCanada.ca/ seven-cs

**Outside Criteria:
7Cs an informational guide to young children's outdoor play spaces**

Susan Herrington, Chandra Lesmeister, Jamie Nicholls, Kate Stefiuk
Consortium for Health, Intervention, Learning and Development (CHILD)

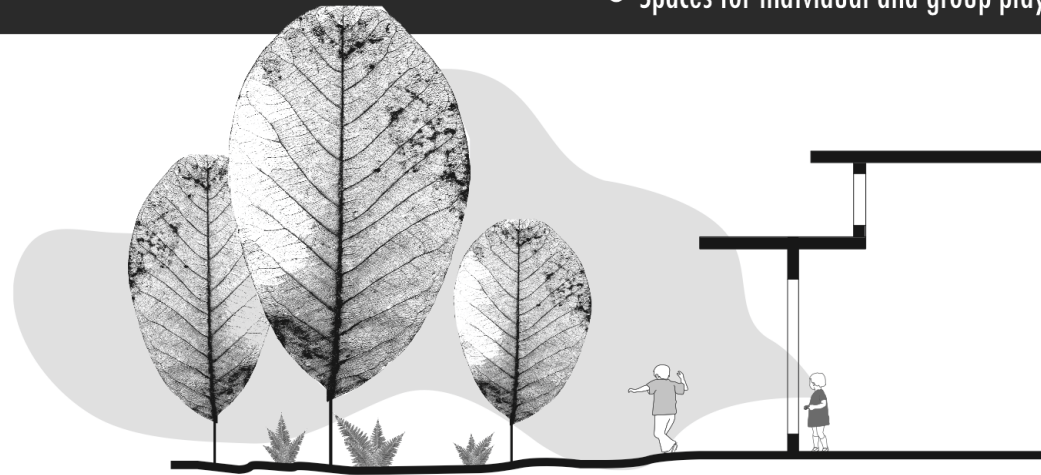
Highest Quality Spaces ARE:

- Scaled to child
- Sensitive to climate



Highest Quality Spaces INCLUDE:

- Living Materials
- Elements children can manipulate
- Flexibility to allow imagination to shape play
- Spaces for individual and group play





Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](https://www.sciencedirect.com)

Journal of Environmental Psychology

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jep

Landscapes for play: Effects of an intervention to promote nature-based risky play in early childhood centres

Mariana Brussoni ^{a, b, c, d, *}, Takuro Ishikawa ^{c, d}, Sara Brunelle ^{c, e}, Susan Herrington ^e

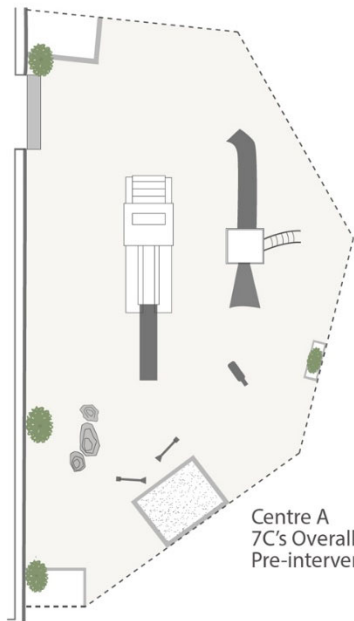
^a Department of Pediatrics, University of British Columbia, 2D19–4480 Oak Street, Vancouver, British Columbia, V6H 3V4, Canada

^b School of Population & Public Health, University of British Columbia, 2206 East Mall, Vancouver, British Columbia, V6T 1Z3, Canada

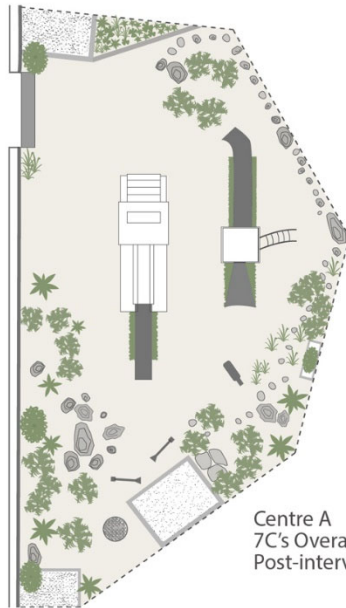
^c British Columbia Injury Research & Prevention Unit, F508–4480 Oak Street, Vancouver, British Columbia, V6H 3V4, Canada

^d British Columbia Children's Hospital Research Institute, 950 West 28th Avenue, Vancouver, British Columbia, V5Z 4H4, Canada

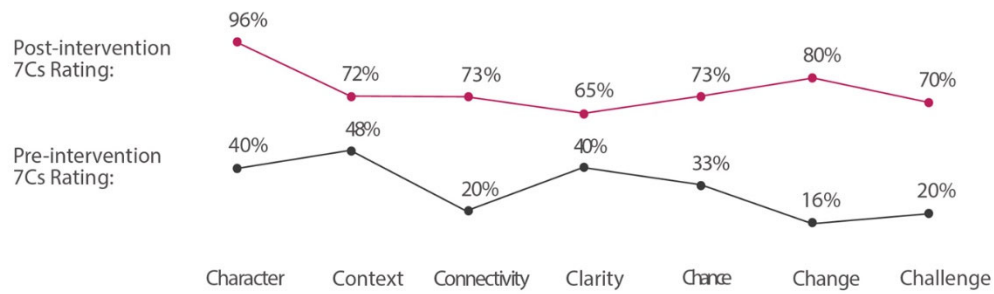
^e School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, University of British Columbia, 379–2357 Main Mall, Vancouver, British Columbia, V6T 1Z4, Canada



Centre A
7C's Overall Score
Pre-intervention: **33%**



Centre A
7C's Overall Score
Post-intervention: **72%**



Pre: “not welcoming”

Boring, ugly
Unsafe, many injuries
Dusty, hot, no shade
Difficult to manage children’s behaviours
Children couldn’t play on their own, without teachers

Easier head count

Post: “very inviting”

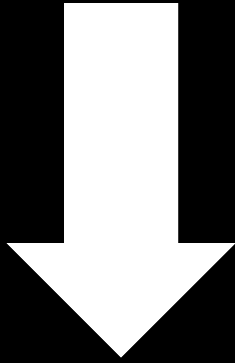
More:

Awareness of nature
Quality time & engagement
Self-regulation
Creativity
Socialization
Problem-solving, focus
Self-confidence

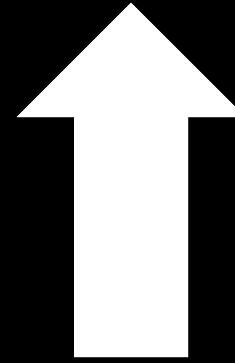
Less:

Teacher-directed
Stress
Boredom
Injury
Noise

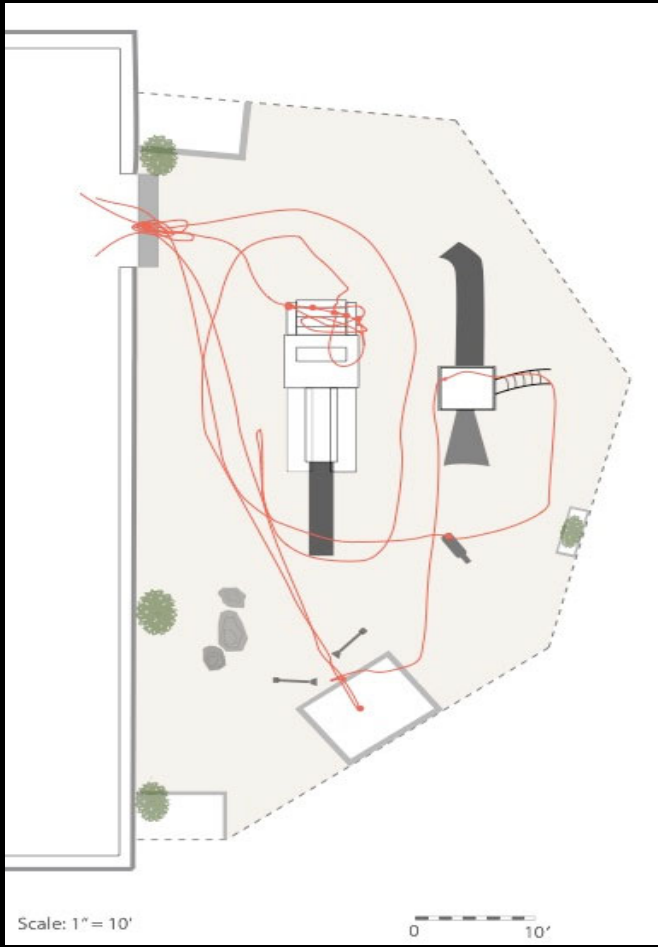
ECE focus groups



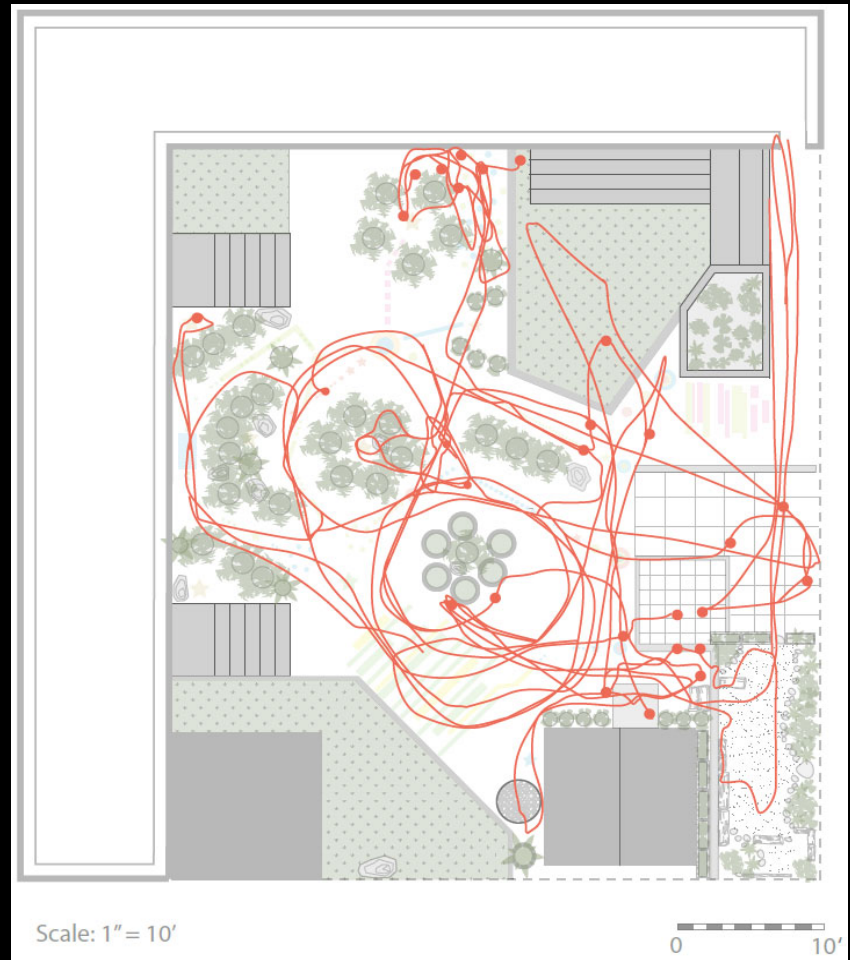
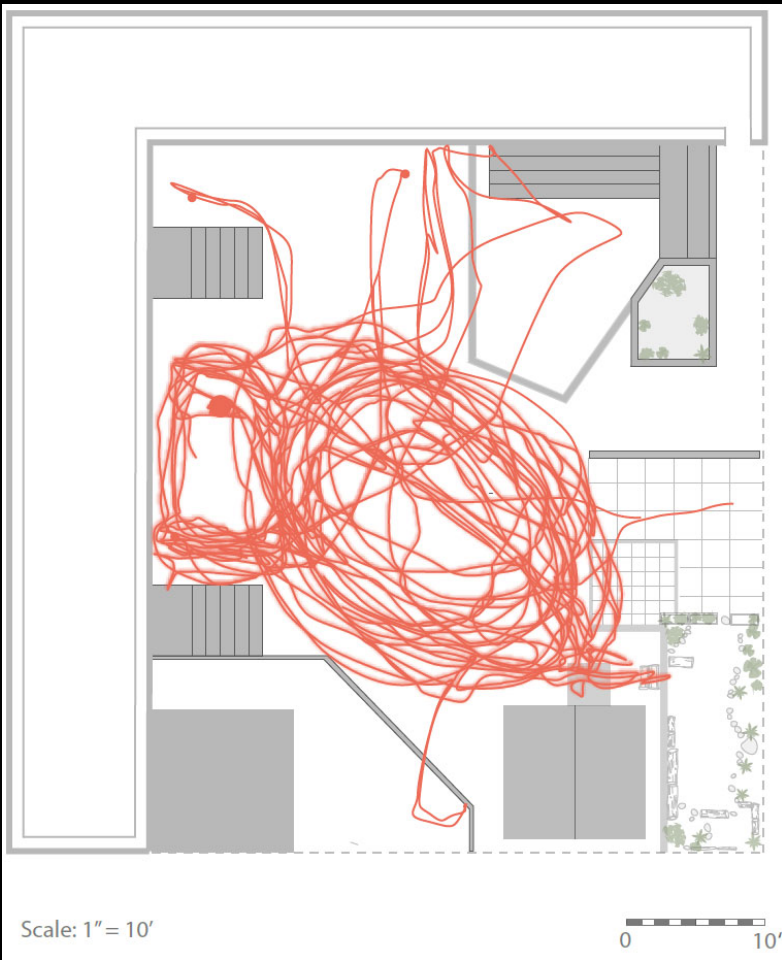
- **Peer problems**
- **Depressed affect**
- **Antisocial behaviour**
- **Child-teacher interaction**
- **Physical activity**



- **Play with natural materials**
- **Prosocial behaviour**



© M. Brussoni, 2019



A young child is captured in the middle of jumping into a large, muddy puddle. The child is wearing a dark blue quilted winter jacket, blue jeans, and bright green rubber boots. They are also wearing a light-colored hat with a patterned design. The ground is a mix of gravel and dirt, with several other puddles scattered around. The child's boots are splashing mud, and their body is slightly blurred from the motion.

Why play is
important for
kids

Why play is
important for
all of us

Why we are
important for
play!

© Angela Roy

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Outdoor Play Canada is a growing network of leaders and organizations working together to galvanize an outdoor play movement across Canada.

[LEARN MORE](#)



About Outdoor Play Canada

The history of outdoor play advocacy, practice and research in Canada is diverse and strong. Recently, there has been a marked increase in multi-sector efforts to align our work and build a movement together.

[LEARN MORE](#)



Position Statement

We conducted two systematic reviews to examine the best available scientific evidence on the net effect (i.e., balance of benefits vs. harms) of outdoor and risky active play.

[LEARN MORE](#)



Resources

Knowledge mobilization is an important part of increasing every child's access to outdoor play. Use these evidence-informed tools to support outdoor play in your community.

[LEARN MORE](#)

Thank you!

Dr. Mariana Brussoni
mbrussoni@bcchr.ubc.ca

+1-604-875-3712

brussonilab.ca

 mbrussoni

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