

Key words: Play, outdoor play, early childhood education, kindergarten, ECE legislation

Abstract

This report provides an overview of Canadian provincial and territorial perspectives of outdoor play in child care and kindergarten settings. It reviews curriculum frameworks that guide early childhood practice and the legislative oversight of early childhood environments to assess potential contradictions. While legislation can be a barrier to outdoor play, the paper finds other restrictive factors including educator/parent perceptions, lack of green space, fear of litigation, restrictive standards and funding mechanisms. The overarching barrier to outdoor play is limited access to early childhood programs.

i) Methodology

This report analyzes provincial and territorial curriculum frameworks examining if and how the concept of the “classroom as the third teacher” extends to the playground. A document scan of Canadian sources identified the terms used to describe active play. Provincial and territorial curriculum frameworks for kindergarten and licensed child care were reviewed to identify their view of play as it relates to children’s development; references to outdoor play and its purpose; and, the role of educators in facilitating outdoor play. Findings are presented in table format by province and territory. Regulations governing outdoor play practices in licensed child care were also identified. A word analysis of provincial/territorial kindergarten and early childhood curriculum frameworks and the legislation governing these programs rates jurisdictions on a scale of ‘low’ to ‘high’ for their attention to outdoor play. The authors then analyze the extent to which regulations that are designed to secure children’s safety, constrain the ability of educators to support active outdoor play.

ii) The purpose and terminology of outdoor play

Play in the outdoors can be both structured to include games with rules, such as sports or it can be free, unstructured and open-ended.ⁱ It expands children’s experiences to include contact with nature and other elements not found in indoor settings. ParticipAction’s *Position Statement* discusses play in nature and the outdoors.ⁱⁱ The benefits include “healthy mental and physical development”, “connections to nature to promote the environment”, “connections to their community”, “less screen time and exposure to violence”, and “greater exposure to better air quality”.

Under the umbrella of outdoor play different themes and definitions have emerged which have found their way into early childhood curricula and legislation.

Nature Play refers to play in natural environments. British Columbia Recreation and Parks Association's *Healthy in Nature* promotes nature playgrounds as a way "to connect people to nature", "expose the wonders and beauty of nature", and "provide open-ended and creative play options".ⁱⁱⁱ It encourages the use of natural materials where children are permitted to construct their own play.

Forest Schools or Nature Schools are premised on the interconnections between humans and nature. Children climb trees, walk on uneven terrain, bounce off logs, step along rocks and use knives, hammers and saws to build their own shelters. Indigenous people have had a complex land-based education for thousands of years reflected in educational approaches honouring the environment as teacher and experiential and peer-to-peer learning. This is finding reflection in provincial curricula; for example Keewatin Public School in Northwestern Ontario is certifying its educators as Forest School Practitioners.

Risky play provides children with opportunities to challenge themselves, test limits, explore boundaries and learn to make decisions about injury and risk. Sandseter (2007) described play with excitement, exhilaration, a desire to overcome fear and to feel "out of control".^{iv} In 2010, Tovey provided examples of risky activities including climbing, jumping, balancing, hanging upside down and sliding.^v Such actions are associated with emotional regulation—the theory that one of play's major functions is to teach young mammals how to regulate fear and anger.^{vii}

The Canadian Public Health Association describes risk as "the possibility that something bad or unpleasant (such as injury or a loss) will happen", created by "the challenges and uncertainties within the environment that a child can recognize and learn to manage by choosing to encounter them and to determine their own limits."^{viii} A hazard is "a danger in the environment that could seriously injure or endanger a child and is beyond the child's capacity to recognize".^{ix}

Different stakeholders use different adjectives when describing outdoor play. Government documents favour 'active play'. Risky play is included in documents by the City of Calgary^x, the Thunder Bay and District Health Unit^{xi}, and Waterloo Region^{xii}. Other stakeholders, including psychologists, landscape and playground contractors use active play and risky play interchangeably.

Adam Bienenstock of Bienenstock Natural Playgrounds describes the challenges in finding the correct wording.^{xiii}

"We have focused almost entirely on physical risk or risk of physical injury when we speak about active play and I think that risk has to be defined more broadly because there is social risk that has to be taken in order to learn how to communicate, how to read, how to write, how to discuss and articulate....The type of risk that we keep missing is the emotional risk and vulnerability that kids have to have to break down the barriers between them."

The International School Grounds Alliance (ISGA) describes risky outdoor play as “an essential component of a well-functioning school ground. Adults and institutions have a responsibility to use common sense in providing and allowing risk-taking activities for children and young people.”^{xiv} The declaration promotes risky play and its statement can be endorsed on their website. Educators, it says are responsible for risky play opportunities that would “develop common sense” attributes. Parents and adult family members, school boards, administrators, legislators, legal authorities, and insurers need “to establish opportunities with beneficial levels of risk”. School grounds, it says, should be “as safe as necessary” not “as safe as possible”.^{xv}

iii) Canadian Context

a. Early childhood curriculum frameworks: Definition of play, its role and the role of the educator

An early childhood education curriculum framework guides educators in constructing early learning environments and assessing children’s development as well as cultivating reflection about their own practice. Provincial curriculum guides for child care and other early years programs are relatively new in Canada. Now available in nine provinces, the use of guides is often optional or may be mandated for some early years programs and not others. For example, the first framework was adopted by Quebec in 2007 for use in its publicly funded Centres de la Petite Enfance. It is not required for privately operated garderies.

Frameworks are under development in Nunavut, the Northwest Territories and Newfoundland.

Table 1. References to play in early childhood curriculum frameworks/Provinces & Territories

Jurisdiction	Newfoundland and Labrador	Prince Edward Island
Title		PEI Early Learning Framework: Relationships, Environments, Experiences
Year	In development	2011
Program requirement		Early Years Centres
Role of Play	Play is defined as a holistic approach to children’s development and learning.	“intrinsic value of play for child development”. (p.15)
Role of Outdoor Play		
Goals Related to Outdoor Play	Goals under discussion include well-being and belonging as well as play and exploration	Wellbeing; Physical Health and Personal Safety; Environmental Awareness and Care of the Earth
Role of the Educator		“Educators should help children to develop small and large muscle strength, coordination and agility” (p. 92).

Table 1 (con't). References to play in early childhood curriculum frameworks/
Provinces & Territories

Jurisdiction	Nova Scotia	New Brunswick
Title	Capable, Confident, and Curious: Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework (Draft)	New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care
Year	2018	2008
Program requirement	Pre-primary	
Role of Play	"Play provides opportunities for children to learn as they discover, create, improvise, and imagine." (p.26)	"... play is essential to quality of life in childhood and the primary means of understanding the world." (p.1)
Role of Outdoor Play	"Outdoor learning spaces are an important feature of children's learning environments. They offer a vast array of possibilities not available indoors." (p.32)	"Play and playfulness: children experience open and flexible environments where playful exploration, problem solving, and creativity are encouraged as well as being purposefully planned." (p.99)
Goals Related to Outdoor Play	"[Outdoor environments] foster an appreciation of the natural environment, develop environmental awareness, and provide a platform for ongoing environmental education."(p.32)	Well being; Play and Playfulness; Physical Health; Imagination and Creativity; Playful exploration and Problem-solving; Dizzy Play, Sustainable Futures
Role of the Educator	"... it is the responsibility of the educator to construct and adapt indoor and outdoor environments with the intention of preparing them for children's joyful learning. (p.11)	"Provide all children with opportunities for vigorous daily physical activity, both indoors and out. Encourage children to explore play spaces and take risks to move in new or challenging ways. Support, encourage, and guide child-initiated healthy risk taking. "When outside, model and join in children's free movement: run, chase, dance, and spin with them." (p.95)

Table 1 (con't). References to play in early childhood curriculum frameworks/
Provinces & Territories

Jurisdiction	Quebec	Ontario
Title	Meeting Early Childhood Needs: Quebec's Educational Program for Childcare Services	How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years
Year	2007	2014
Program requirement	Centres de la Petite Enfance	
Role of Play	"Children learn through play. Play is the pleasure that children derive from it and it must be considered the main tool whereby children express themselves, learn and develop." (p.20)	"Play and Inquiry are learning approaches that capitalize on children's natural curiosity and exuberance." (p.10) Through play and inquiry, young children practise ways of learning and interacting with the world around them that they will apply throughout their lives." (p.15)
Role of Outdoor Play	"... allowing children to move about and run each day, both indoors and outdoors, contributes to good physical and mental health, and helps prevent obesity." (p.26)	"to provide children with interesting opportunities for a reasonable degree of risk taking, giving interesting and unpredictable opportunities." (p.29)
Goals Related to Outdoor Play	Within the overall holistic development of children, this includes dimensions such as physical and motor attributes.	Nurturing Healthy Development and Well-Being.
Role of the Educator	There are no guidelines for educators relating specifically to outdoor play aside from reflection and documentation of the child's overall development.	"creating safe and stimulating outdoor spaces for intentional active play that is individualized and adapted as needed to support children's varied abilities, offering challenges that are within each child's ability to master." (p.32)

Table 1 (con't). References to play in early childhood curriculum frameworks/
Provinces & Territories

Jurisdiction	Manitoba	Saskatchewan
Title	Early Returns. Manitoba's Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework	Play and Exploration Early Learning Program Guide
Year	2011	2008
Program requirement		
Role of Play	"Research shows that children learn best through play. ... Play has intrinsic value far beyond a way to fill time. Play provides unlimited possibilities for learning and development." (p.6)	"The criteria that Hughes (2003) offers to define play are: freedom of choice, personal enjoyment and focus on the activity rather than on its outcome. These three criteria are foundational to the play process in connecting children's development with their learning." (p.24)
Role of Outdoor Play	"To support children's physical development, they should be encouraged to be active and use their large and fine motor skills." (p.5)	"Physical activity promotes overall development and stimulates neural connections. It is a foundational aspect of growth and wellbeing in children."(p.29)
Goals Related to Outdoor Play	Physical Development	"Environments that accommodate children's physical development provide opportunities for them to represent their physical power through adventures in pretend play and risk taking and 'trying out their developing 'powers'." (p. 46)
Role of the Educator	"strive to make the environment a place where children want to be – where they are comfortable and feel they belong. .. outdoor surroundings should connect and engage children with nature. (p.14)	"Ensure that children have time outdoors daily. Provide outdoor space with open areas for tricycles, digging, running and jumping allow children to use and expand their emerging strengths."(p.48)

Table 1 (con't). References to play in early childhood curriculum frameworks/
Provinces & Territories

Jurisdiction	Alberta
Title	Flight: Alberta’s Early Learning and Care Framework
Year	2014
Program requirement	
Role of Play	“Children’s play is an active, exploratory, creative, expressive process, deeply embedded in children’s everyday experiences and through which children participate in, learn about, and actively make sense of the world. (p.12)
Active Outdoor Play	“ Releasing and restoring energy in outdoor places.” (p.95)
Role of Outdoor Play	“..outdoor play that exercises the muscles, lungs, heart, and mind—running, jumping, digging, swinging, rolling, and strolling; and shouting and squeaking and twirling and swirling—dizzy play for the pure pleasure of being on the edge and sharing the joy of laughter and life with others.” (p.98)
Goals Related to Outdoor Play	Outdoor play is present in all the developmental domains.
Role of the Educator	“Educators recognize and valuing play for what it provides for the children: a release of physical energy, a sense of power, and often an expression of pure joy. ... Educators, aware of the resilience of children, must also assure that they are safe as they push their physical limits.” (p.101)

Table 1 (con’t). References to play in early childhood curriculum frameworks/
Provinces & Territories

Jurisdiction	British Columbia
Title	British Columbia Early Learning Framework
Year	2008 Revised 2018
Program requirement	BC StrongStart
Role of Play	“the importance of play for children to experience the world through seeing, feeling, touching, listening and by engaging with people, materials, places, species, and ideas . Play is an approach to inquiry, a way to research the world.”(p.27)
Active Outdoor Play	“During active play, children learn to have fun while being physically active. Regular physical activity through play allows children to release their energy, display calmer behaviour during the day, and sleep better at night. During group play activities with their peers, children are building relationships, combining ideas, compromising, developing oral narratives, and learning to take the perspective of others—key elements of social competence, creative thinking, imagination and early literacy.
Role of Outdoor Play	“It is important to acknowledge that pedagogy takes place outdoors and indoors, and neither has more inherent value than the other.” (p.27)
Goals Related to Outdoor Play	“Learning about their bodies in space. Increasing bodily awareness, control, strength, agility, and large motor coordination. Increasing fine motor capacities Knowing and stretching physical limits. Releasing and restoring energy in outdoor places.” (p.95)
Role of the Educator	“By providing diverse materials and experiences educators create spaces for experimentation and transformation. With pedagogical narrations, educators can record moments of play to make learning visible, invite others (colleagues, children, families) to share their perspectives, and consider different theories.” (p.27)

Play is well established in the early learning guides as the medium through which children gain skills and knowledge and experience their environments. The value of outdoor play is not as well recognized. Guides were analyzed for their references to outdoor play.^{xvi} PEI's document makes no reference to the outdoors. Alberta references it 24 times (Figure 1). Note: counts do not include words found in headers, footers, headlines, subheads or website links.

The concept is often associated with physical health and well-being rather than its centrality to holistic development. While all guides cover physical activity, this is not synonymous with free, active, outdoor play and is sometimes linked to learning games or sports. Outdoor play and safety are commonly connected.

Early learning frameworks were also reviewed to see how often they provided direction on physical activity that is more likely to be associated with outdoor play. Figure 2 assesses the number of times guides prompt educators to include play that involves the following: active, physical, large motor, rough and tumble, dizzy, energetic or risk taking play or to engage children in activities that include: crawling, walking, marching, running, leaping, jumping, hopping, climbing, sliding, slithering, skipping, galloping, digging, swinging, hanging, twirling, swirling, strolling, dancing, rolling, and spinning. Language promoting physical movement in educator guides may encourage a higher level of attention to these types of activities and raise awareness of the importance of the outdoors to children's development.

Figure 1. Number of references to outdoor play in early childhood curricula by Province/Territory

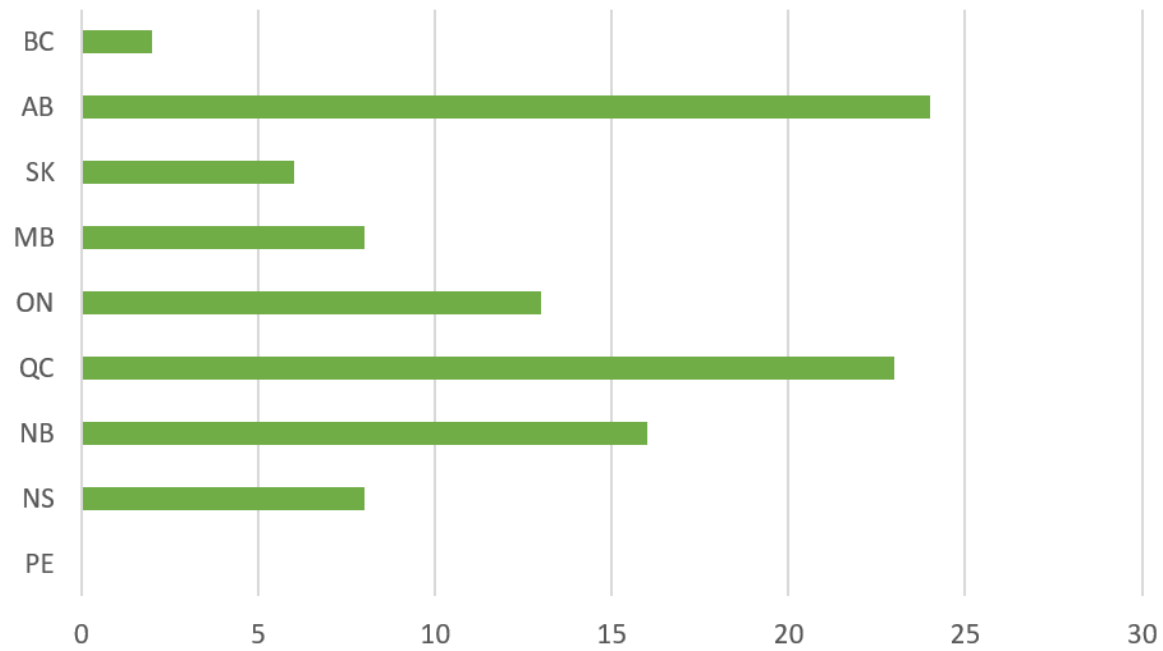
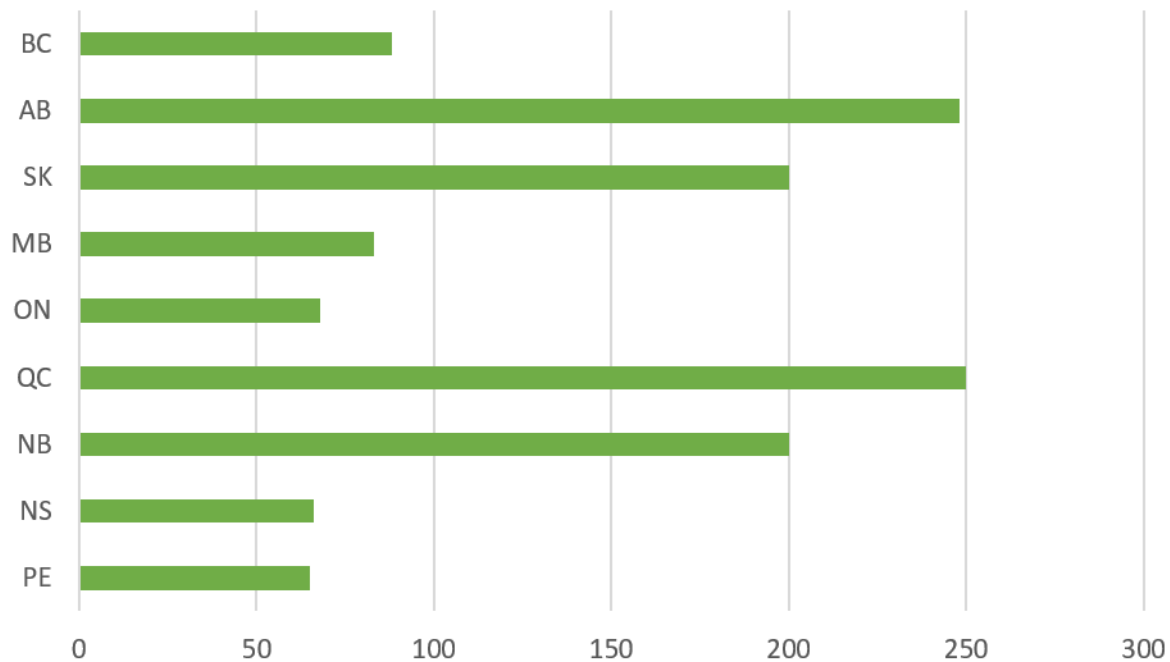


Figure 2. Number of references to active play in early childhood curricula by Province/Territory



New Brunswick, Quebec, Saskatchewan and Alberta have the strongest language on active play. Alberta and New Brunswick list risk taking most often, while other curriculum guides mention this type of play infrequently. Prince Edward Island's guide has a dedicated section on the environment with frequent references to the earth, nature and environmental stewardship. Quebec's and Manitoba's program documents are more focused on the physical and motor dimensions of children's development. Ontario concentrates on natural play materials and environments. Saskatchewan provides extensive direction for outdoor play. Alberta's program highlights dizzy play, energetic play, the nature and environment. British Columbia promotes the environment and indigenous knowledge.

In addition to its early years framework, New Brunswick has supplementary documents on active play^{xvii}. It dives deep into dizzy play; the loud, boisterous, silly, physical and sometimes rough and tumble play that young children find exhilarating and infectious. British Columbia has developed Appetite to Play^{xviii}, an interactive website designed to support early years providers to promote and encourage physical activity and healthy eating. *Let's Talk About Learning Through Play*^{xix} is a pamphlet for parents with children in Nova Scotia's pre-primary program (4 year olds) outlining the role of play. These or similar documents are not included in the word count.

iv) Kindergarten Program/Curriculum Guides: Definition of play, its role and the role of the educator

Kindergarten program guides support educators and schools in establishing appropriate learning environments and outcomes for young children. As part of public education, kindergarten is more established than licensed child care with fewer variations in program content and staffing qualifications. Each jurisdiction has a program guide and their use is mandated. Kindergarten programs across Canada share similar educational goals. They aim to foster age-appropriate growth and learning, challenge and stimulate children, and prepare them for school. They also have similar ways of determining whether these goals have been met.

Kindergarten educator guides are long established with the earliest in use in Canada in the 1870s.^{xx} Many jurisdictions have recently revised their program documents, often to accommodate a change from half day to full school day programming or to reflect the inclusion of younger children. YK, NWT, BC, ON, QC, NB, NS, PEI and NL provide full day kindergarten for 5 year olds. ON and the NWT offer universal kindergarten to 4 year olds. NS and QC are in the process of expanding eligibility to all 4 year olds. Schools in the YK, AB, SK, MB offer programming to younger children in some localities and under special circumstances.

Some provinces/territories (ON, MB, SK, NWT) have specifically designed curricula to bridge early years learning to formal schooling. Others organize activities and assessments along the same subject areas that continue into the elementary grades and secondary school. The Yukon uses BC's kindergarten program.

Table 2 highlights the view of the play reflected in Kindergarten Program/Curriculum Guides, as well as the roles and goals of outdoor play and the role of educators in promoting outdoor play.

Table 2. Defining play, its role and the role of the educator in Kindergarten Curricula by Province & Territory

Jurisdiction	Newfoundland and Labrador	Prince Edward Island
Title	Completely Kindergarten Curriculum Framework	Kindergarten Integrated Document
Year	2012	2008
Role of Play	“Play is the foundation of all learning in kindergarten and is the most appropriate means by which children can work through scenarios, take risks, and solve problems while recognizing their preferred learning modalities and styles.” (p.2)	“It is through play that much of children’s early learning is achieved. The physical, social/emotional, and intellectual development of children is dependent upon activity. Therefore, opportunity for play is a key aspect of the kindergarten program...Play should be seen as an essential experience that extends, enhances, and enriches a child’s learning.” (p. 25)
Role of Outdoor Play	“Kindergarten children have an inherent need to move and they learn by doing. When child-centred learning experiences are intertwined with active participation, significant physical development and intellectual gains are made. An understanding of the nature of the kindergarten child is extremely important for optimal physical development.” (p.7)	“Through indoor and outdoor play, [children] develop their imagination, creativity, learn how to solve problems, and work cooperatively.” (p.25)
Goals Related to Outdoor Play	“Demonstrate concern for the safety of self, others and surrounding environment.”(p.H68)	Participate in and explore the benefits of physical activity.” (p. 144) Develop and control large and small muscles. (p.138)
Role of the Educator	“Through teacher’s guidance children are encouraged to take appropriate risks and learn the important rules of working and playing together.” (p.4)	Participate in and explore the benefits of physical activity.” (p. 144) Develop and control large and small muscles. (p.138)

Table 2 (con’t). Defining play, its role and the role of the educator in Kindergarten Curricula by Province & Territory

Jurisdiction	Nova Scotia	New Brunswick
Title	Nova Scotia Curriculum Documents: Streamlined curriculum P-3.	You and Your World Curriculum Kindergarten - Grade 2. (Curriculum for the Anglophone sector)
Year	2015	2005
Role of Play	NS curriculum is organized around subject areas. The role of play is not defined. Play activities are associated with the Physical Education and Health Education areas and focused on physical development, fair play and safe play.	NB has separate curricula for the French and Anglophone streams. The English curriculum is organized around subject areas. Play is associated with physical education and the development of healthy lifestyles, health knowledge, personal and social skills and safe participation. Playing games with rules is associated with communication, critical thinking, decision-making and self-management skills.
Role of Outdoor Play	NA	Outdoor play provides learning opportunities for science, geography and culture.
Goals Related to Outdoor Play	Respect for outdoors: “... importance of leaving the outside environment in the condition it is found when participating in physical activities outside (e.g., school yard clean-up.” (p.7)	Students will be expected to identify and explain types of activities that support a healthy lifestyle. (p.33)
Role of the Educator	Educators are prompted to provide verbal and non-verbal cues to support children’s physical competencies.	Educators are encouraged to use the community to enhance the children’s learning experiences.

Table 2 (con't). Defining play, its role and the role of the educator in Kindergarten Curricula by Province & Territory

Jurisdiction	Quebec
Title	Quebec has distinct Kindergarten programs, one for 5 year olds: Québec Education Program, chapter 4, Preschool Education (2012) and Québec Education Program, Preschool Education Program for 4-Year-Olds (2017) (jP4)
Year	2017
Role of Play	“Through their play and spontaneous activities, children express themselves, experiment, construct their learnings, structure their thoughts and develop their world- view. They learn to be themselves, to interact with others and to solve problems. They develop their imagination and creativity. Spontaneous activity and play are their way of mastering reality; this justifies giving play a central place in preschool education and organizing the space and time accordingly.” (p.52)
Role of Outdoor Play	“Outdoor play is also important, particularly for the development of motor and social skills, and should be scheduled on a regular basis.” (p.4) The 5-year-old program does not reference outdoor play.
Goals Related to Outdoor Play	Motor and social skills
Role of the Educator	The teacher’s actions allow [children] to carry out increasingly complex activities, stimulate their desire to surpass themselves and help them become aware of new realities. (p.53)

Table 2 (con't). Defining play, its role and the role of the educator in Kindergarten Curricula by Province & Territory

Jurisdiction	Ontario
Title	The Kindergarten Program.
Year	2016
Role of Play	<p>“Play is an optimal context for enabling children to work out their ideas and theories and use what they already know to deepen their understanding and further their learning. ...</p> <p>Play is a vehicle for learning and rests at the core of innovation and creativity. It provides opportunities for learning in a context in which children are at their most receptive.” (p.18)</p>
Role of Outdoor Play	<p>“The learning environment extends to the outdoors. A growing body of research suggests that connecting to the natural world contributes to children’s mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health and well-being (Louv, 2005). Children’s natural curiosity and sense of wonder can be fostered by providing them with many opportunities to learn outdoors. The learning that takes place in classroom experiences can be explored in the “extended classroom” that nature provides. Similarly, the natural environment can be reflected in the indoor learning environment. (p.34)</p>
Goals Related to Outdoor Play	Self-regulation and well-being and problem solving and innovating.
Role of the Educator	<p>“ Learning in the outdoors is included as part of the instructional day, and the educators play an active role, engaging with children in an inquiry stance as they play, explore, and learn together outside the classroom. (p. 34)</p>

Table 2 (con't). Defining play, its role and the role of the educator in Kindergarten Curricula by Province & Territory

Jurisdiction	Manitoba
Title	Kindergarten Curriculum
Year	Manitoba's kindergarten program follows subject areas for K-Grade 12. Subject areas have been developed and updated at different times.
Role of Play	The K-12 curriculum does not discuss play. Manitoba Education and Training's Early Childhood Education website provides resources to educators and parents. It describes play as: "Recent neuro-scientific research validates play as children's natural way to learn. ... Research also demonstrates that play-based learning leads to greater social, emotional, and academic success. When children are playing, children are learning."
Role of Outdoor Play	The curriculum describes activities that could be performed outside but does not directly discuss the outdoors as a learning environment.
Goals Related to Outdoor Play	Learning outcomes for kindergarten state children should "Experience different ways of moving (e.g., climbing, running, hopping...) in a variety of play areas on the school grounds (e.g., on playground equipment, hard-top area, grassy fields...)" (p.52)
Role of the Educator	NA

Table 2 (con't). Defining play, its role and the role of the educator in Kindergarten Curricula by Province & Territory

Jurisdiction	Saskatchewan
Title	Saskatchewan Curriculum: Kindergarten.
Year	2010
Role of Play	As children engage in meaningful play and inquiry, they become more knowledgeable, confident, and creative learners. (p.2)
Role of Outdoor Play	Recognize that physical movement is good for personal well-being. Show respect for nature when participating in outdoor physical movement activities. (p.56)
Goals Related to Outdoor Play	Active Living, Skilful Movement, and Relationships.
Role of the Educator	“It is important for educators to be aware of the process of inquiry learning and how it can be a natural and important part of play. Inquiries can take place in a variety of environments, including those in the school setting and within the community.” (p.8)

Table 2 (con't). Defining play, its role and the role of the educator in Kindergarten Curricula by Province & Territory

Jurisdiction	Alberta	British Columbia & Yukon
Title	Kindergarten Program Statement	Full Day Kindergarten Program Guide
Year	2008	Revised 2016
Role of Play	"Through organized activities and purposeful play, children explore and experiment with their environment. They clarify and integrate information and concepts encountered in their previous experiences." (p.5)	"Kindergarten children learn with their whole bodies, their minds, and their hearts. They learn best when activities are play based, involving exploration and inquiry, with hands-on activities that engage all their senses." (p.8)
Role of Outdoor Play	NA	"Outdoor activity provides opportunities to connect with community through walks and to use environment as a teaching tool, as well as achieve the mandated 30 minutes of daily physical activity."(Section 4)
Goals Related to Outdoor Play	"The child acquires basic locomotor, nonlocomotor and manipulative skills through developmentally appropriate movement activities in a variety of environments." (p.29)	Daily physical activity helps develop movement skills and physical literacy, and is an important part of healthy living
Role of the Educator	"...create learning environments that are responsive to children's diverse needs; capabilities; learning styles; dispositions and cultural, social and linguistic backgrounds." (p.1)	"Educators can initiate play in various ways, from creating a thoughtful environment, to giving hints and prompts, to modelling what to do, to providing explicit instruction. (Section 3)

Table 2 (con't). Defining play, its role and the role of the educator in Kindergarten Curricula by Province & Territory

Jurisdiction	Northwest Territories	Nunavut
Title	NWT Junior Kindergarten / Kindergarten Curriculum	Kindergarten Curriculum
Year	2017	
Role of Play	During play children use all their senses, communicate their thoughts and emotions, explore their environment, and connect what they already know with new knowledge, skills and attitudes. (p. 7)	Nunavut organizes its curriculum around subject areas.
Role of Outdoor Play	Part of active living and integrated learning outcomes. (p.24)	NA
Goals Related to Outdoor Play	As above	Activities and outcomes include physical well-being and activities.
Role of the Educator	Curriculum begins with an educator who plans activities that extend into all the lived experiences, intentionally planned or not, of 4 and 5 year old children in the learning environment.	NA

While most kindergarten guides promote the centrality of play to children's learning, there is great variation in the number of references to the outdoors as an extension of the learning environment (Figure 3). Four out of 13 jurisdictions make no mention. Only Manitoba and Ontario highlight the outdoors, mentioning it 75 and 74 times respectively. References to nature are most associated with scientific learning outcomes, along with building environmental stewardship.

Figure 4 assesses the number of times guides prompt educators to include play that involves the following: active, physical, large motor, rough and tumble, dizzy, energetic or risk taking play or to engage children in activities that include: crawling, walking, marching, running, leaping, jumping, hopping, climbing, sliding, slithering, skipping, galloping, hanging, digging, swinging, twirling, swirling, hanging, strolling, dancing, rolling and spinning.

Active play is largely associated with physical development. In jurisdictions where the kindergarten curriculum is organized along subject areas, the tendency is to focus on teacher-led learning games tied to outcomes aimed at children mastering movement control.

Figure 3. Number of references to outdoor play in Kindergarten program guides by Province/Territory

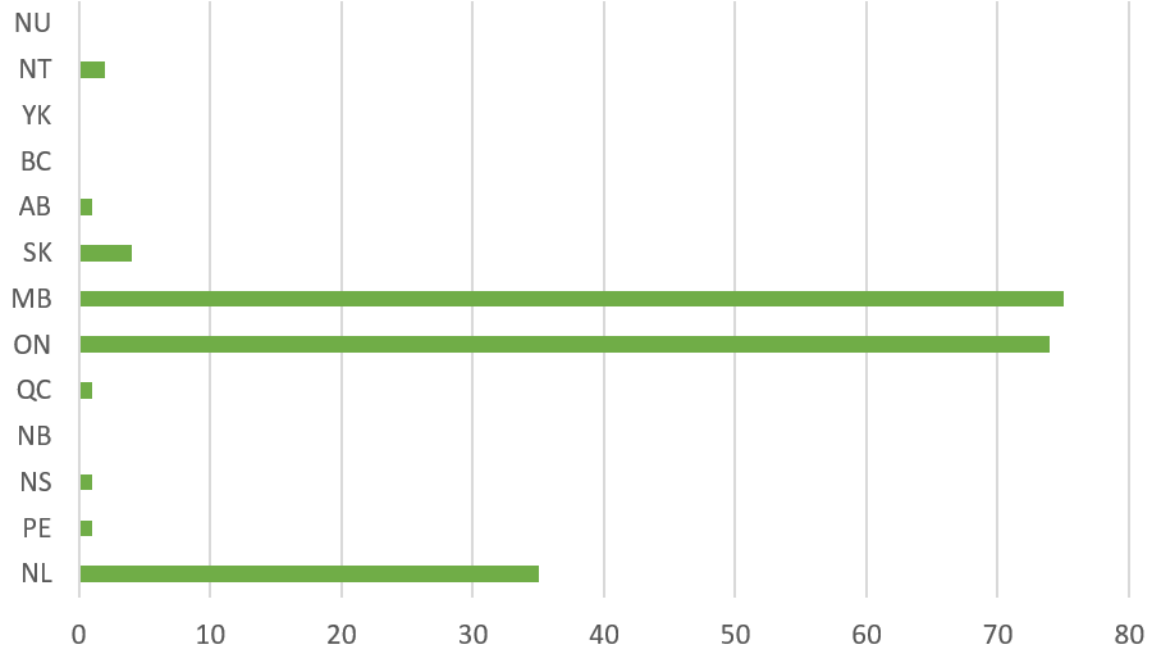
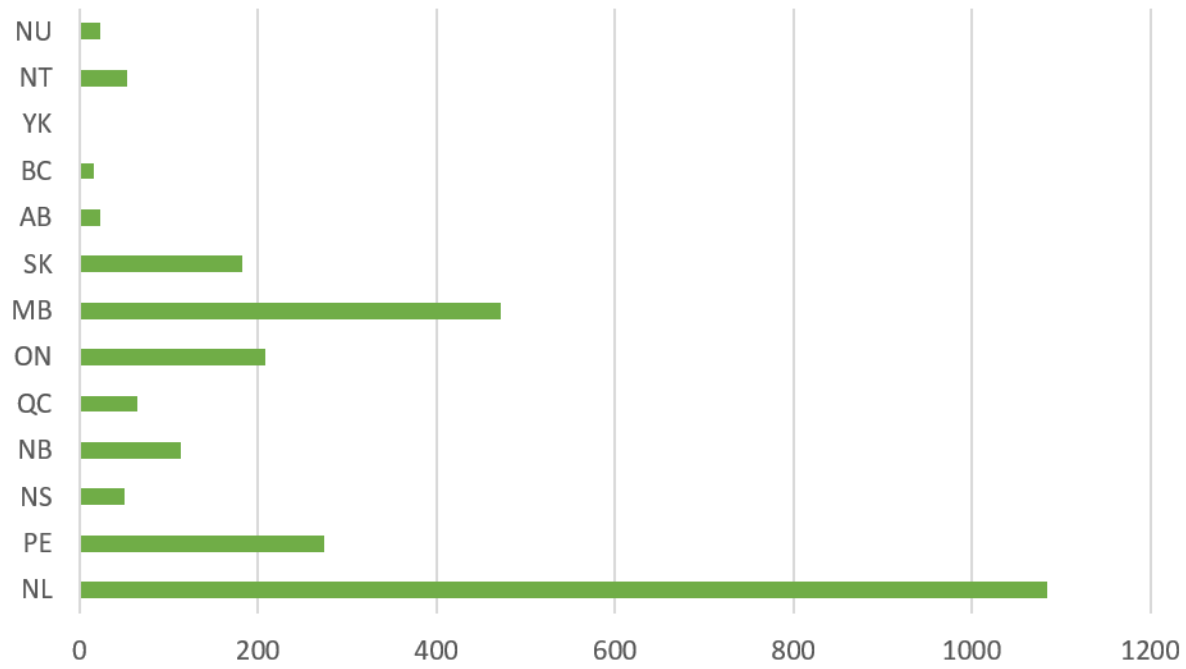


Figure 4. Number of references to active play in Kindergarten program guides by Province/Territory



i) Review of Child Care Legislation and Licensing Manuals

a. Child care legislation

All provinces and territories have legislation regulating licensed child care. Primarily delivered as a market service, licensing provides a level of assurance to parents as consumers and accountability to government as funders. Programs must meet the minimum standards to operate and most jurisdictions follow a routine of inspections to control for compliance. Directions for the design of outdoor play spaces vary widely by jurisdiction. Ontario, for example requires pre-approval of playgrounds as a condition of licensing. Its licensing officials report to the branch within the Ministry of Education responsible for child care. In BC, child care policy is within a children's ministry while licensing is carried out by regional health authorities. Approvals are at the discretion of local officials.

Figure 5 illustrates the common licensing requirements related to outdoor play in group child care. Licensing may also stipulate inspections, routines, materials, equipment, staffing, lighting, access to shade, etc. Seven provinces require playground spaces, fixed structures and surfacing meet Canadian Standards Association standards.

All jurisdictions have outdoor space requirements that limit the number of children permitted in a playground at one time (Figure 6). Space requirements vary from as little as 4 square metres per child in Quebec to 7 square metres in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and PEI; or about the half the size of a parking space. Space per child may not refer to the licensed capacity of the centre but only to those children on the playground at any one time. For example Quebec's 4 square metres per child refers to one-third of the centre's licensed capacity.

The specified height of fencing for outdoor playgrounds is a condition in eight jurisdictions (Figure 7). Playground size and fencing have cost implications for early childhood programs.

Figure 5: Selected Licensing Requirements For Outdoor Play by Province/Territory

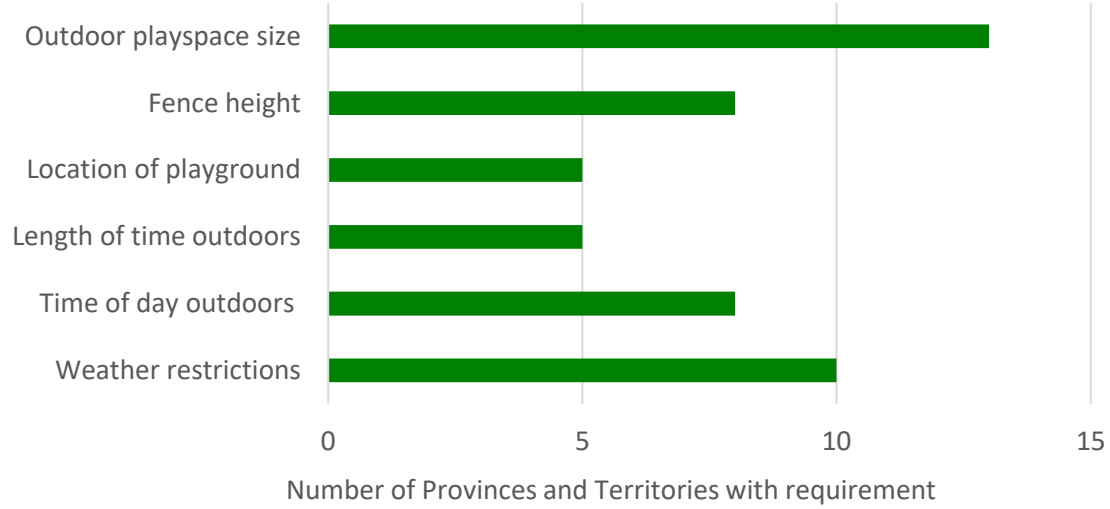


Figure 6. Minimum outdoor playground space per child

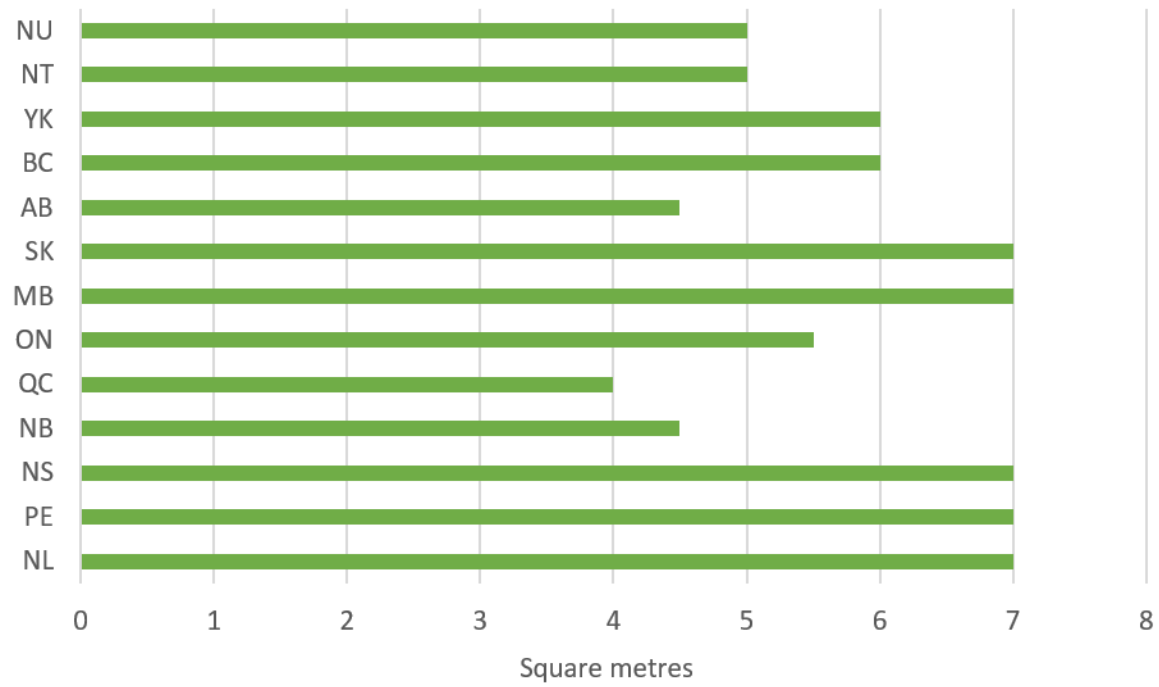
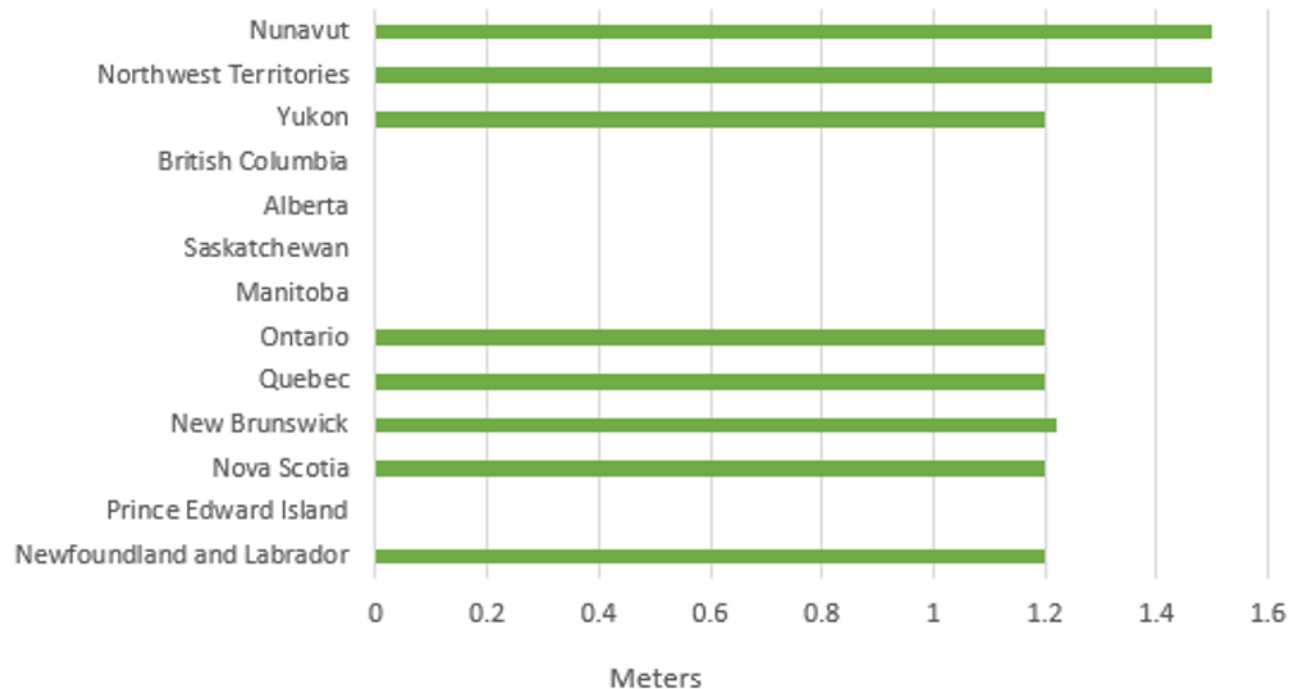


Figure 7. Minimum fence height for outdoor playgrounds



Only five provinces stipulate a minimum time for outdoor play. New Brunswick requires 60 minutes during each four-hour time block that a program operates. British Columbia provides for a 60 minutes minimum in their supplementary legislative document. Ontario requires 120 minutes outdoors. The Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut and Quebec require daily outdoor activity but do not specify an amount of time.

Policies may also require the use of sunscreen, insect repellent and protective clothing or restrict clothing with hoods, strings, etc. Outdoor play may be curtailed by extreme heat, cold, smog, storms, etc.. The frequency of extreme weather brought on by climate change places additional restrictions on children's access to outdoor play.

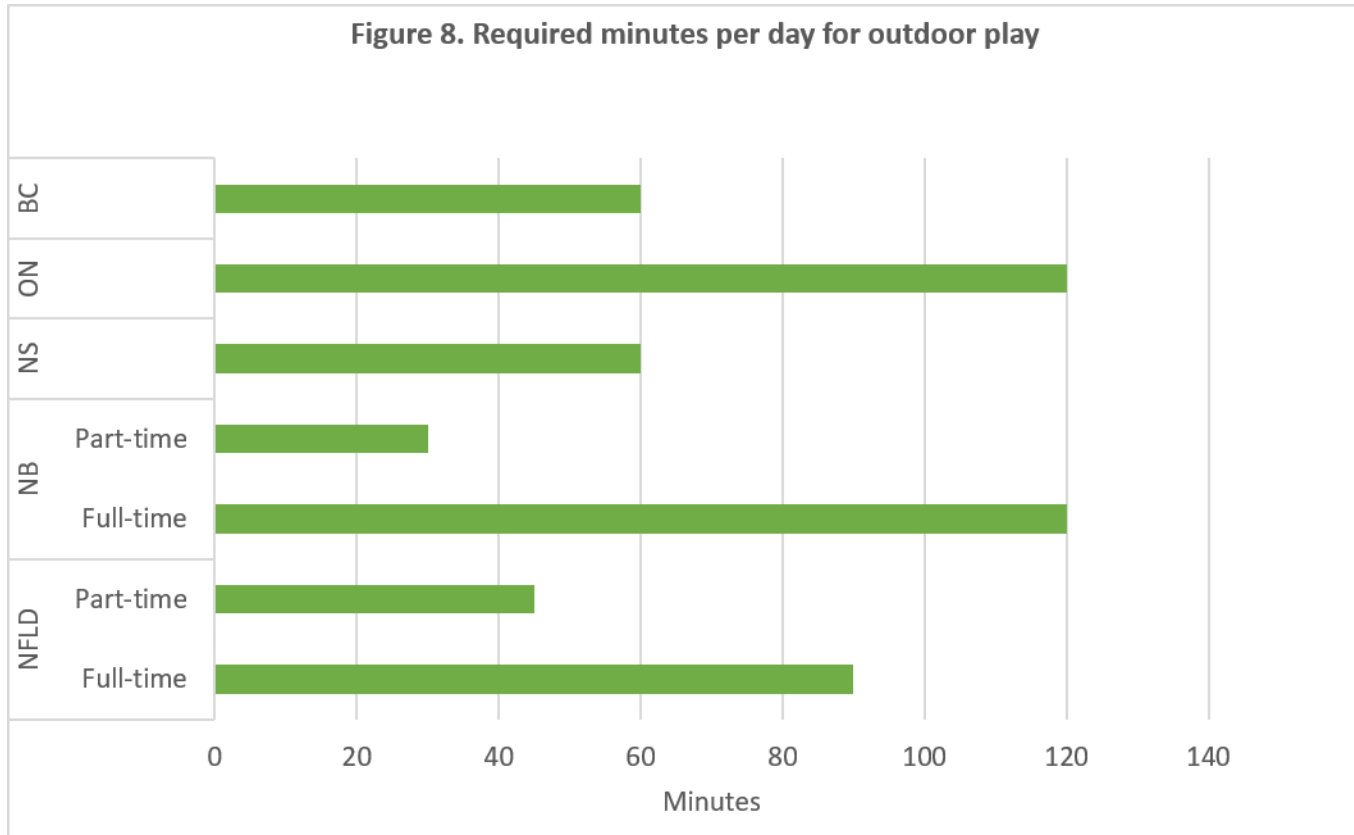
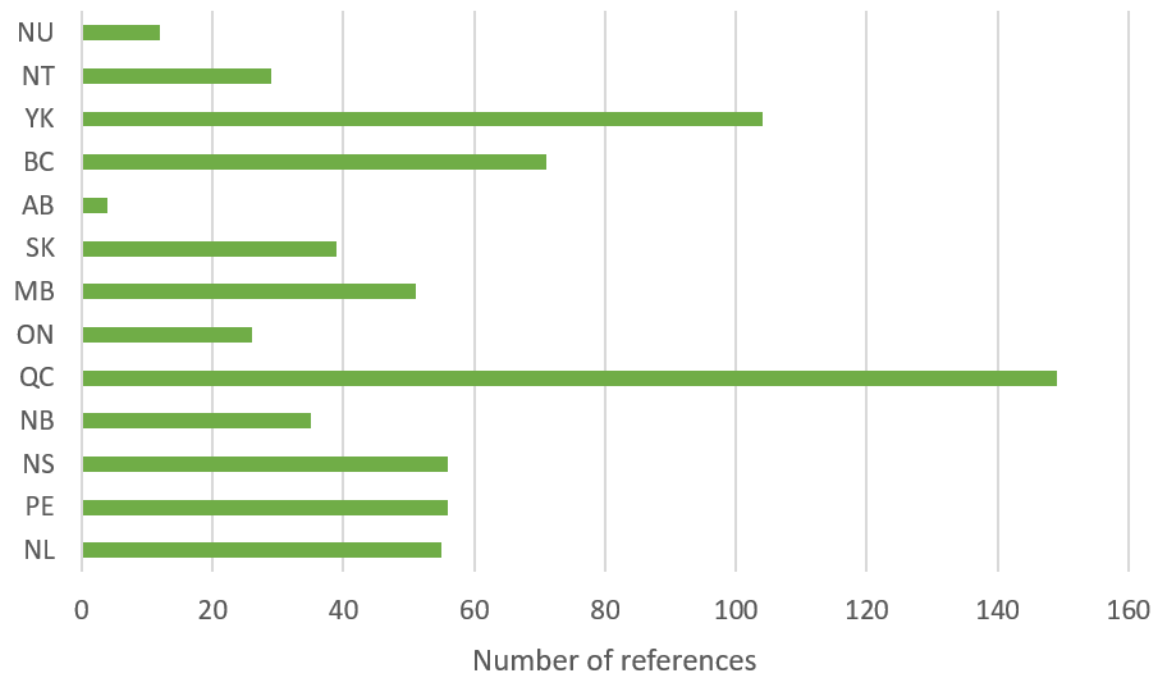


Figure 9. References to Safety Concerns in Child Care Legislation



b. Child Care Licensing Manuals

Child care regulations will at a minimum stipulate playground safety. Jurisdictions may detail, clarify or update legislative requirements through licensing manuals. These newer and updated documents tend to provide more resources for outdoor play, suggesting a new understanding of its benefits. Table 3 highlights these developments. “NA” indicates directives provided by regulations.

Table 3. Directions for outdoor play in child care licensing manuals

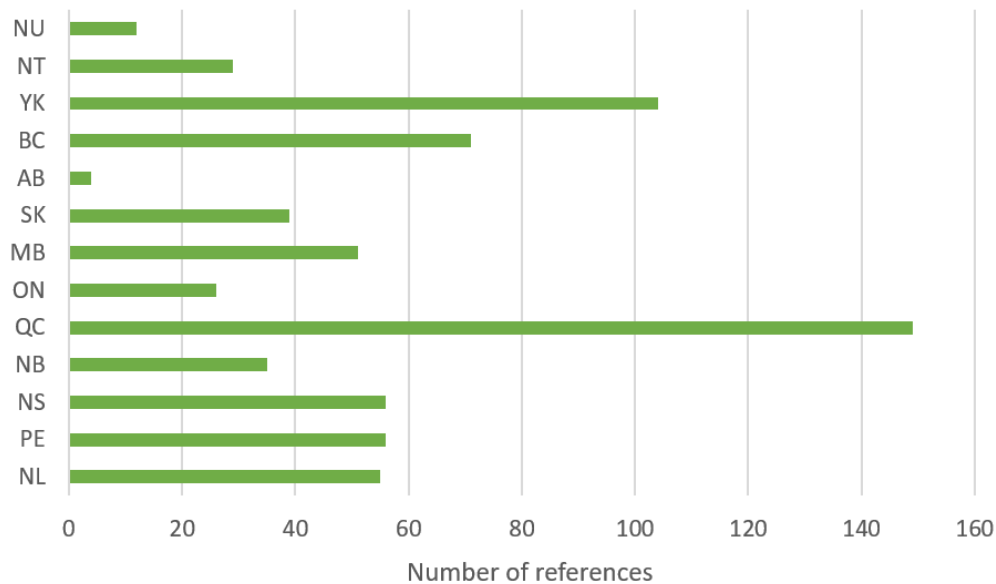
Jurisdiction	Year	Directions for Outdoor Play
Newfoundland and Labrador	2017	Suggests schedules including optimal times for outdoor play. Outdoor play resources are provided along with checklists to inform practice.
Prince Edward Island	NA	Early Learning and Child Care Act Regulations require all furnishings, play equipment and toys at the licensed centre, whether indoors or outdoors to meet the applicable requirements of the Canada Consumer Product Safety Act (Canada).
Nova Scotia	2012 Updated 2018	Provides health and environmental guidelines and directions for outdoor play organization, planning, materials and playground safety. Stipulates minimum times for free play and outdoor play.
New Brunswick	2018	Suggestions for material and activities to enhance outdoor play and prompts the educator through a series of questions to consider the role of the outdoors in children’s holistic development.
Quebec	NA	Regulations provide for daily outdoor play.
Ontario	2018	Encourages operators to consider the environment as a “third teacher”, and promotes a range of play materials to support complex thinking and creativity and “challenge children to take Child manageable risks that will foster a sense of competence and mastery”. p. 44
Manitoba	2013	Discusses various outdoor activities, play materials and a possible schedule.
Saskatchewan	2016	Space and health and safety requirements are outlined. Under ‘Best Practice’ operators are urged to expand playgrounds beyond the minimum licensing requirements to “9 - 18 sq. metres/child” and to design play areas to accommodate different sized groupings of children. (p. 6-10)
Alberta	2012	Health and safety guidelines have not been updated.
British Columbia	2016	Specific guidelines discuss time of day for outdoor play and suggest activities.
Yukon	n.d.	Provides guidelines for maintaining space and equipment outdoors
Northwest Territories	2013	Provides numerous resource documents supporting active outdoor play. Pp. 235- 239.
Nunavut	2014	Includes extensive outdoor play literature with numerous resources supporting outdoor play.

viii.) Focus on Safety in Child Care Regulations

Child care legislation is intended to ensure the health, safety, and developmental needs of children are met. All jurisdictions emphasize safety in child care settings. Legislation was analyzed by counting the number of references to safety-oriented words (Figure 9). These included safety, safe, unsafe, risk, injury, hazard, first aid, fall zones, shade, temperature, wind chill, weather, cold weather, UV index, sunscreen, and insect repellent.

Legislation in most jurisdictions requires operators to adhere to current Canadian Standards Association guidelines for playgrounds^{xxi}. Municipal requirements and regional public health directives are also embedded in legislation or policy directives.

Figure 9. References to Safety Concerns in Child Care Legislation



viii.) Safety in School Delivered Programs

Provincial/territorial education acts do not provide detailed directives on school safety. Responsibility is downloaded to school districts and principals to promote “safe, inclusive and accepting school environments for students and staff”^{xxii}. Jurisdictions all have additional policy directives covering topics such as safe arrivals, bullying, etc. While this should allow for flexibility across school districts, commonality is the norm. Schoolyard rules can be very prescriptive.^{xxiii}

ix.) The Role of Local Government in the Promotion of Outdoor Play

Some municipalities take an active role in child care development and oversight and have additional guidelines for child care playgrounds. In Ontario, local governments have a legislated role for the planning and oversight of child care and have additional requirements for outdoor play spaces. The City of Toronto’s guidelines for preschool aged children recommends providing “increased physical challenges by sloping portions of the riding track” and to “introduce rumble strips.” For upper and lower body motor activity, the guidelines recommend “a) Play mounds for climbing. b) Elements at varying heights for climbing. c) Open surface for ball games, running, rolling”. To develop a connection to the natural environment, it suggests, “children have contact with the natural environment (i.e. plants, sand, earth, water and sun).” and “provide educational opportunities that engage with the natural world wherever possible” and to “combine natural and manufactured features.”^{xxiv}

The City of Vancouver is renowned for its innovative child care design. It sets a minimum of 14 m² per child for outdoor play space with a south facing orientation.^{xxv} Property costs are prohibitive, spurning the city to make creative use of rooftops and other found space. BC’s child care regulations do not restrict rooftop playgrounds. This has been important to the development of child care in one of the world’s most expensive cities.

The City of Calgary has several initiatives to develop natural playgrounds and Winnipeg provides Nature Schools for children living in marginalized communities.

a. ECE compared to Kindergarten Curriculum Frameworks

ECE and kindergarten curricula have many similarities. Most embrace play as the medium through which young children acquire skills and knowledge and learn to understand the world and their place in it. Each jurisdiction promotes children’s physicality and movement as a tool for learning. Some words found in ECE curricula are not present in any kindergarten guides, including: dizzy play, hang, slither, twirl, swirl, and stroll. Kindergarten curricula organized around subject lines are more likely to link outdoor play to outcomes associated with physical development. Nevertheless, neither early childhood stream corners the market on outdoor/active play. Table 4 shows as many ‘high’ reference documents citing outdoor and active play for kindergarten as for child care.

Table 4. References to Outdoor/Active Play in Child Care & Kindergarten Curricula

	Child Care	Kindergarten
NU	N/A	
NT	N/A	
BC		
AB		
SK		
MB		
ON		
QC		
NB		
NS		
PE		
NL		

Low <49

Medium 5–199

High +200

x) **Barriers¹ to Outdoor Play**

a) Parent /Educator perceptions

Safety wins out over having children play outside when educators and parents are asked about their tolerance of risk. Fifty-one percent of Canadian parents say they want their children to play more outdoors, but are worried for their child's safety.^{xxxvi} Access to outdoor play is influenced by factors such as the child's age, gender, the presence of other children, neighbourhood cohesion, traffic and access to green spaces, playgrounds and parks. "Stranger danger" (child abduction or harm by strangers) reduces the likelihood of free outdoor play.^{xxxvii}

Child care licensing focuses on child safety and a duty of care has been established in provincial Education Acts,^{xxxviii} whereby educators are expected to provide a standard of supervision "to protect their students from all reasonable and foreseeable risks of injury or harm".^{xxxix} Playground rules with an elevated focus on safety and fear of criticism from parents and administrators constrain educators from applying their own knowledge of child development to their practice.

b. Fear of litigation

Fear of litigation can also create a play chill. A special edition of the Ontario School Board Insurance Exchange cites 27,000 playground injuries across Canada and warns boards to reduce risk and up their insurance coverage.^{xxx} Parents are also cautioned that they can be held liable if their child injures another. Administrators follow the practice of surplus safety to avoid liability. Following CSA guidelines playgrounds for younger children are often fenced restricting play areas. CSA standards for outdoor play were used to bar children 3-5 years old from using the school playground equipment in Nova Scotia.^{xxxxi} The Toronto District School board removed playground structures that predated revised CSA standards in 100 of its schools.^{xxxii} Rules can also evoke derision. One school banned cartwheels^{xxxiii} and a Toronto principal sparked an outcry when she expelled balls from the school grounds.^{xxxiv} To promote more active play, the Canadian Public Health Association encourages the collection of "learning injuries" in child care and school accident reports to differ from hospital visits or severe injuries.^{xxxv}

c. Access

By far the biggest barrier to outdoor play is access. Only one in two Canadian children between the ages of 2-4 regularly participate in early childhood programs. Kindergarten, Canada's only universal early education program is a mere 12.5 hours a week for 5 year olds in

1

four jurisdictions. For many children, their early childhood program is their sole outlet for outdoor play. A study in the American Journal of Paediatrics found half the preschoolers studied did not have even 1 parent-supervised outdoor play opportunity per day. Girls and minority children were even less likely to play outside, making outdoor play opportunities at child care critical for children of parents who work outside the home.^{xxxvi}

xi Get out and play

Licensing and safety standards are rarely the barriers that they are perceived to be. Soft surfaces around playground equipment and equipment checks do not prevent play. Fences are a perfect surface to bounce a ball or paint a mural. Minimum times for outdoor play are not maximums and almost anything that can be done indoors can be done outside. Boring playground space can be made stimulating with the addition of natural elements and materials children can use to design their own play and play environments. Limited space can be augmented with nearby parks or natural space.

In a risk adverse environment educators are challenged to provide children with the joy that only exuberant, free play can offer. Yet, who besides educators, with their unique knowledge of play, could be better advocates?

Authors:

Kerry McCuaig is a Fellow in Early Childhood Policy at the Atkinson Centre, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto.

Jane Bertrand is an Early Childhood Educator and Adjunct Professor at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto.

The authors would like to thank Kelley Prendergast for her assistance conducting the environmental scan for this paper.

References

- ⁱ Beneteau, M. (2017). Report. Peterborough Public Health. [Outdoor Playspaces: An Evidence Review](#).
- ⁱⁱ ParticipAction. *Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play*. 2015. Retrieved from <https://www.participaction.com/en-ca/thought-leadership/research/2015-position-statement-on-active-outdoorplay>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid
- ^{iv} Beate, E. & Sandseter, E. (2007). *Categorising risky play—how can we identify risk-taking in children's play?* European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 15:2, 237-252, DOI: [10.1080/13502930701321733](https://doi.org/10.1080/13502930701321733)
- ^v Tovey, H. (2010). *Playing on the Edge: Perceptions of Risk and Danger in Outdoor Play*. In P. Broadhead, J. Howard & E. Wood (Eds), *Play and Learning in the Early Years*. London: Sage.
- ^{vi} McFarland, L. & Gull Laird, S. (2018). *Parents' and Early Childhood Educators' Attitudes and Practices in Relation to Children's Outdoor Risky Play*. Early Childhood Education Journal. No. 46 (2018): 159 - 168
- ^{vii} LaFreniere, P. (2011). *Evolutionary functions of social play: Life histories, sex differences, and emotion regulation*. American Journal of Play, 3, 464-488.
- ^{viii} Canadian Public Health Association. (2015). *Risk, Hazard, and Play: What are Risks and Hazards?* Retrieved from <https://www.cpha.ca/risk-hazard-and-play-what-are-risks-and-hazards>
- ^{ix} Ibid.
- ^x Alberta Council for Environmental Education. (2016). Introduction to Forest Schools and Risky Play – Calgary. Retrieved from <https://secure.abcee.org/civicrm/event/info?reset=1&id=100>
- ^{xi} Thunder Bay and District Health Unit/Healthy Kids Community Challenge Thunder Bay. “Risky Play & Outdoor and Unstructured Play” workshop. May 30-31 2016.
- ^{xii} Thompson, C. (2017). *Waterloo preschoolers get 'risky' with hammers and saws*. Retrieved from the Record.com <https://www.therecord.com/news-story/7259765-waterloo-preschoolers-get-risky-with-hammers-and-saws/>
- ^{xiii} Bienenstock, A. Online Interview HiMama. August 14 2018.
- ^{xiv} International School Grounds Alliance. (2017). *Risk in Play & Learning*. Ubud-Höör Declaration. Retrieved from <http://www.internationalschoolgrounds.org/risk/>
- ^{xv} Ibid
- ^{xvii} Ashton, E., Stewart, K., Hunt, A., Nason, P., & Scheffel, T., (2009). *Play and Playfulness Professional Support Document*. Social Development, Government of New Brunswick by the Early Childhood Centre. Retrieved from <https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/ed/pdf/ELCC/ECHDPE/PlayPlayfulness-1.pdf>
- ^{xviii} Appetite to Play Interactive Website (2018). Retrieved from www.appetitetoplay.com
- ^{xix} Nova Scotia Department of Education. *Let's talk about... Learning through Play*. Retrieved from http://www.ednet.ns.ca/files/curriculum/LTA_Play.pdf
- ^{xx} Prochner L. (2015) *The History of Kindergarten as New Education: Examples from the United States and Canada, 1890–1920*. In: Willekens H., Scheiwe K., Nawrotzki K. (eds) *The Development of Early Childhood Education in Europe and North America*. Palgrave Macmillan, London.

-
- ^{xxi} CSA Group (2014). Canadian Standards Association (CSA) Standard for Children's Playspaces and Equipment (Z614-14). Retrieved from <https://www.cpsionline.ca/index.php?action=cms.trainCpsiResources>
- ^{xxii} Ontario Ministry of Education (2017-2018). A Safe and Welcoming School Environment. Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/safeschools.html>
- ^{xxiii} As an example see Anthony Paddon Elementary. *Playground rules and safety*. Retrieved from <http://anthonypaddon.weebly.com/playground-safety-rules1.html>
- ^{xxiv} City of Toronto. (2016). *Child Care Design and Technical Guideline*. Retrieved from <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/8641-CS-childcaredesign.pdf>
- ^{xxv} City of Vancouver. (1993). *Childcare Design Guidelines*. Retrieved from <https://vancouver.ca/docs/planning/childcare-design-guideline-1993-February-4.pdf>
- ^{xxvi} IKEA. (2015) *The Play Report*. Retrieved from https://www.ikea.com/ms/zh_HK/pdf/reports-downloads/IKEA_Play_Report_2015.pdf
- ^{xxvii} Canadian Public Health Association. (2018). *Parental Perceptions of Play*. Retrieved from <https://www.cpha.ca/parental-perceptions-play>
- ^{xxviii} Ministry of Education. The Education Act, 2018. Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/edact.html>.
- ^{xxix} Berryman, J.H. (1998). *Duty of care, 1998*. Retrieved from http://professionallyspeaking.oct.ca/december_1998/duty.htm
- ^{xxx} Ontario School Boards' Insurance Exchange (2010). *Are Playgrounds Safe?* Retrieved from https://www.osbie.on.ca/uploads/oracle/EN/69_Oracle_EN_Update.pdf
- ^{xxxi} Bennett, P.W. (2018). *Playground Safety Policy: Why are School Districts restricting Children's Outdoor Play?* Educhatter. Retrieved from <https://educhatter.wordpress.com/2018/08/09/playground-safety-policy-why-are-school-districts-restricting-childrens-outdoor-play/>
- ^{xxxii} CBC News (November 22, 2000). *Toronto District School Board to consider restoring dismantled playgrounds*. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto-district-school-board-to-consider-restoring-dismantled-playgrounds-1.215874>
- ^{xxxiii} Postmedia Network, London Free Press (November 19, 2017). *Northern Ontario school set to ban cartwheels*. Retrieved from <https://lfpres.com/2017/09/19/northern-ontario-school-set-to-ban-cartwheels/wcm/14107528-aac6-9bb3-c32a-48c4d93327ac>
- ^{xxxiv} Thompson, P.J. (November 16 2011). National Post. *Parents cry foul after elementary school bans balls over playground safety*. Retrieved from <https://nationalpost.com/posted-toronto/parents-cry-foul-after-elementary-school-bans-balls>
- ^{xxxv} Canadian Public Health Association (2019). *Playground Injuries*. Retrieved from <https://www.cpha.ca/playground-injuries>
- ^{xxxvi} Tandon PS, Zhou C, Christakis DA. Frequency of Parent-Supervised Outdoor Play of US Preschool-Aged Children. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med*. 2012;166(8):707–712. doi:10.1001/archpediatrics.2011.1835