



An introduction to Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL)

Supporting school improvement through play

www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk



What is OPAL?



AWARDS
2018
FINALIST



School Improvement, Teaching, Playwork

An award winning school improvement programme designed to support schools improve the quality of their playtimes.

**Active School Programme Awards
2018 European Winners**



**'88% of teachers worldwide
say that children are happier
after playing outdoors.'**

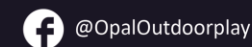
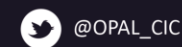
Muddy Hands Report, 2018

#OutdoorClassroomDay



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Introduction: What is OPAL?

**We combine:
School Improvement - Teaching - Playwork**

A strategic school improvement programme supporting school improvement through play

OPAL supports senior managers to create sustainable change in culture and practice

OPAL provides support through regular meetings spread over 12-24 months and over 100 resources



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cm7IfAEsjql&t=2s>

YOU TUBE: Amazing primary playtime at St Michaels OPAL Platinum School

OPAL Versus Non-OPAL

Why Not?

- Fear
- Risk-Aversion
- Money
- Not valuing play
- Historic practice
- Lack of awareness

Non-OPAL

- Inside on wet days
- Not accessing all of the grounds
- Lack of play resources
- Risk-averse
- No Leadership
- Reactive

OPAL Impact

- Improved behaviour
- Increased learning time
- Happier children
- Outside in all weathers
- Risk and adventure
- Play Zones/resources/Loose parts
- Inclusive
- Key Responsibilities: Play Coordinator plus a Curricular Lead for Play



Time

- Play
- Other



Play makes up 20% of school life

Per Year

- 231 hours
- 37 days
- 7.4 weeks

Primary Years

- 1.4 years



Childhood Trends

Rising childhood mental health disorders

Enfield Health and Wellbeing © 2020

- **1 in 8 children (12%) between 5 and 19 years** are diagnosed with a mental health condition
- **5 - 15 years (5.8%)** has an emotional disorder including anxiety and depression **(increased by 48% from 2004-2007)**



Youngminds.org.uk *New Figures Show A Rise In Young Peoples Mental Health Problems Since 2004*

Play Memories Exercise

Were there any adults around?

**What are your
strongest memories
of play at age 8 - 11?**

Where were you?

Who were you with?

What were you doing?



What is Play?



Play is a process that is ...

- Freely chosen
- Intrinsically motivated
- Self directed



Learning

ne
able
um

children
e things that
be taught

Children need to **PLAY** to
BE ADAPTABLE
CONSTRUCT KNOWLEDGE
PROBLEM SOLVE **LEARN** **CREATE**
PROCESS EMOTIONS
INTERNALISE EXPERIENCES
DISCOVER **CHALLENGE**
BE HEALTHY THEMSELVES
LAUGH & HAVE FUN
LEARN TO WORK TOGETHER **IMAGINE**
LEARN TO LEAD
EXPRESS IDEAS **EXPLORE** **SPEAK**
DEVELOP **READ**
AN INQUIRING MIND **WRITE**
MANAGE STRESS **COUNT**
Because **PLAY** matters.



The benefits of play ...

- Strength and endurance
- Whole body coordination
- Emotional attachment
- Emotional and social skills
- Hand-eye coordination
- Thinking, reasoning, problem solving
- Early language development

- Communication skills
- Literacy
- Numeracy
- Artistic creativity
- Narrative skills
- Social and group work skills
- Understanding rules
- Discussion skills
- Mental representation

• Self-regulation:

the ability to be aware of and regulate one's own cognitive and emotional mental states and behaviour.





What is the role of adults in play?

Positive and negative aspects



Adult Intervention

Hinders

- Be careful
- You're going to hurt yourself
- That's too big for you
- Passes on own anxiety
- Distracts child from engaging in certain play types
- Adulterates play –gets over involved/excited
- Over competitive
- Allows child to always win
- Judgmental
- Risk-averse
- Dominating

Helpful

- Supportive
- Models behaviour
- Follows child's direction
- Provides resources
- Thinks about when to intervene
- Waits to be invited
- Observes
- Learns and Reflects

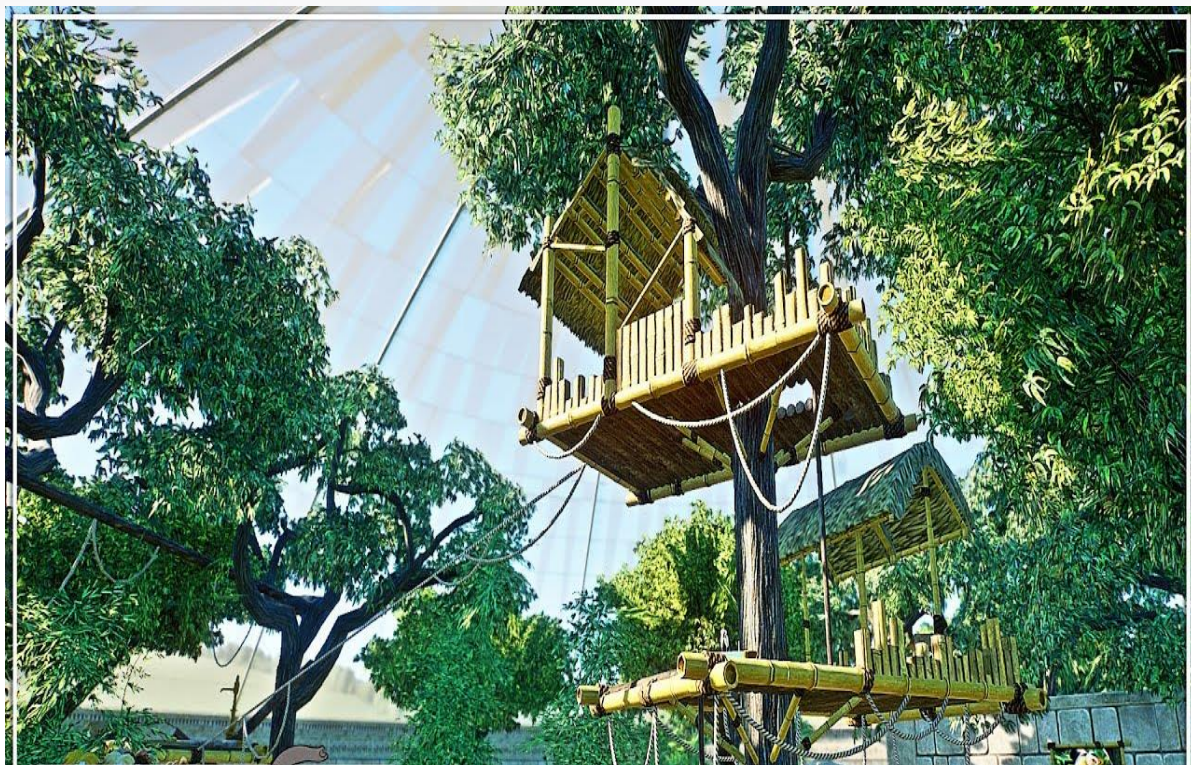


Awareness allows us to make the changes we need to support a child.



What has changed?






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A London School Playground


For a good quality of life ... what do children need?



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We are the gatekeepers of children's experience: we control, restrict or provide access, permission, time, space and opportunities.

Great play helps make a better school



- Platinum OPAL schools have 10 minutes more teaching time per teacher per day
- Up to 80% less accidents and incidents
- Improved pupil enjoyment, happier children
- Increased physical activity
- Improved behaviour
- Inclusion for all





What's changed so far?

- Welly sheds
- Access to the forest at lunch time
- Resources!
 - Tyres - outdoor giant games
 - Pallets
 - Cones
 - Scooters
 - Music
 - Equipment

Access means all of the grounds all of the year





**We live in a
wet, muddy
country.**

**Let's all
get over it**



Risk-benefit





Dangerous Activity?

Risk = The ability to move beyond what is already known and already easily accomplished

Resilient learners overcome the risk of failure, pain and uncertainty





Children's Play and Leisure

Promoting A Balanced Approach

September 2012

Health and Safety
Executive

'Play is great for children's well-being and development.'

'When planning and providing play opportunities, the goal is not to eliminate risk, but to weigh up the risks and benefits.'

Striking the right balance means:

- Weighing up risks and benefits.
- Focussing on and controlling the most serious risks.
- Recognising that the introduction of risk might form part of play opportunities and activity.
- Understanding that the purpose of risk control is not the elimination of all risk
- Ensuring that the benefits of play are experienced to the full



Risk Benefit Activity

Example: Tree climbing

Benefits	Risks	Risk Management
Upper Body Strength	Fall from height	Mark tree so children are aware of how high they are allowed to climb

- Den Building
- Tree Climbing

- Scooter Play
- Riding a bike

- Car Tyre Play
- Pallet play

• Trampoline

• Sand pit

• Boat model



Risks

of 'Risk-free' play

- Scared to try
- All work and no play
- Boredom
- Listless, no learning
- Lack of control
- Unprepared for life ... now and in the future
- Incompetence

Benefits

of Risk In Play

- Reduces risk of obesity
- Improves physical health and development, gross and fine motor skills
- Resilience and capacity
- Social skills
- Feelings of achievement, development of self-esteem, sense of self



**OPAL's
5 Point
Approach
R.A.P.I.D**

Risk Benefit Assessments

Assemblies

Policy

Inspection of equipment

Dynamic risk assessment





The Playwork Principles



Children's Play Policy

We have the right to:	We have the responsibility to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● have fun at playtimes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● make sure that everyone has fun and our play does not stop this.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● make our own decisions about our play and choose what we do.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● make sure our decisions don't affect others in a negative way.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● choose who we play with and include others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● make sure that no one is left out of play or forced to do something they don't want to.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● play with lots of different toys and have a well looked after environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● take pride in, respect and look after our environment and toys.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● explore be creative and take thoughtful risks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● think about what we are doing and talk to <u>a</u> adult from the play team about the risks we are taking if they ask us to.

Journeys ... how can children travel?



Pallet houses, baking tins, wheelie bins ...

time to get creative!



Affordance – Scale - Generosity



Can you help?

- What's in your loft ... it maybe really useful!
- Who do you know ...
tree surgeon, plumber, builder, water board,
sign writer, office/admin ...
what waste might they have?
- Most things offer tremendous play value





Thank you for listening and for your contributions




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