

## The A,B,Cs of Physical Activity, Play and Motor Learning

A substantial amount of international research has documented children's need for explorative, experiential and challenging physical play. Through versatile and all-round varieties of play forms and play environments children will develop basic movement skills and learn how to master their body in different and challenging situations. Children's play is motivated through curiosity and fantasy of exploring the environment and this allows them to master their own bodies and learn to move in a variety of different ways.

This symposium will consider how the abilities of: agility, balance and coordination ('the A,B,Cs') are stimulated and developed through different and open-ended affordances of play within four different European countries. The purpose of this is to share how the same early movement abilities (A,B,Cs), are developed according to context, culture and environment. The four countries have been chosen as their natural or adapted environments are varied, but they are all used to enhance and help the children to explore, engage in movement that develop their A,B,Cs.

Different kind of A,B,C's will be demonstrated: Finland through focusing on the use of snow and ice. Belgium through focusing on the use of water and aquatic activities, using the specific CEReKi approach. Norway through focusing on the use of the woods and forest environments and England through the use of beach, sand and indoor environments. The use of tools and equipment to help support the children's development will be examined as well as the role of the teacher to help aid the early movement skills within each different natural or adapted environment. Photography and illustrations will demonstrate how the A,B,C's are developed differently within each country.

### Paper one - Finnish perspective

The purpose of this presentation is to concretize affordances of Finnish nature during winter – ice and snow. Ice is fascinating slippery surface. It challenge children's balance and agility constantly, when they are moving or playing on the ice. Children need to activate all their neuro-muscular systems to coordinate their body limbs to keep their balance. Controlling their bodies in different postures while standing or moving helps motivate their play. Therefore, moving on the ice can be seen as playing with own body and trying to keep the balance.

Beautiful white snow is free mattress for children: children are attracted to jump, run, throw, dive, cave, lay, roll, spin and use their creativity and desire to make whatever they imagine to try. These physical activities are excellent stimulation for the movement. Moving in the snow slows down children's movements and they need to use more strength than without snow.

Nordic children are lucky to have attractive winter affordances, ice and snow to tempt them physically active play. Challenging surfaces and materials demand concentration, which is prerequisite for development of physical abilities and motor coordination. The seasonal variation with changing affordances may be one reason causing good motor competence of Nordic children.

### Paper two - Belgium's perspective

The aquatic environment is generally for children a source of pleasure and fulfilment. However, water presents physical characteristics for which the humans are not fundamentally constituted. The ability to move in the water is governed by different rules that the child must appropriate in a progressive way. For example the child has to move from the vertical position to the horizontal position in water.

Propulsion uses more the upper limbs than the lower limbs. Water resistance changes the speed of segmental movements and breath must be controlled. The aquatic environment should be discovered in a suitable, progressive and fun way. This is what is proposed with the CEReKi original water familiarization method developed in Belgium.

The purpose of this presentation is to illustrate how an original arrangement can stimulate the agility, balance and coordination (ABC's) of the child in the water through active play. Specially adapted equipment is introduced into the pool to provide a stimulating environment, allowing children to evolve according to their desire and level. This presentation will show how a synthetic fibre net, bars, floats, a metal cage or slides can be used to develop children's aquatic ABC's in an adapted and affording environment.

#### Paper three - Norwegian perspective

Children learn movements and gain bodily experiences by exploring different environments. Through bodily experiences, children explore details and quality of movements such as balance, coordination, speed, agility, force and endurance. Children develop perceptual-motor skills through natural spontaneous interaction with the environment. The materiality of the environment affords challenges and experiences that promote motor learning and the children respond by exploring, discovering and face the challenges by mastering perceptual motor skills in context with the environment.

This presentation will demonstrate how children's physical play is stimulated and developed through different and open-ended affordances of play

"How to encourage explorative and problem-solving play"

"How do landscapes promote motor learning and mastering of bodily competence?"

Approaches:

- \* Children's play and learning through experience will be demonstrated through a video of a natural play space
- \* Open-ended affordances of landscapes will be presented

Literature and case studies showing the contextual environment- child relationship in learning fundamental motor skills will be discussed. Multifunctional and challenging environments seem to have promotive effect on children's physical and explorative play and should therefore be encouraged as a pedagogical approach in motor learning.

#### Paper four - English perspective.

Nowhere within the UK is further than 70 miles (113 kilometres) from the coast, and England is made up of 2728 miles (4,422 km) of coastline. The coastline has a variety of natural textures from flat sandy dunes to steep white cliffs such as those found at Dover. The beach and coastline offers English children an almost Jurassic exploration, as it is the place that is full of beauty, history and fossils, with many schools having weekly or daily 'beach school' in which the children, learn, explore and play on the beach environment.

The photographs and illustrations provided in the paper will show how the abilities of agility, balance and coordination are developed through a variety of ways using the sand and beach environments. For example the fine and coarse sand are ideal for sensory touch development with children from very young age. Both the actual outdoor environments of the beach and rock pools as well as sand

pits, sand boxes and water boxes within indoor settings are used to develop physical curiosity, through hiding objects that the children have to use fine motor skills to dig out, to use pincers to help develop their grasping, reaching and coordination skills.