

OUTCOMES OF NATURAL PLAY AND LEARNING SPACES: A COLLABORATIVE CASE STUDY

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A NEED FOR NATURE

- There is a growing disconnect between humans and the natural world (1-4).
- One potential solution focuses on greening or naturalizing public playgrounds (5).
- Relevant literature has made significant contributions to our understanding of naturalized playgrounds and the developmental outcomes that can be fostered in them (5-7).
- Current research has yet to sufficiently investigate the ability of these spaces and associated natural play and learning mentorship to contribute to a culture of advocacy for outdoor play and learning.

NARRATIVE PROGRAM EVALUATION

- A collaborative case study guided by *improvisational inquiry* (8).
- Informed by tenets of participatory research, evaluative research, narrative inquiry, and observational research.
- Data collection focused primarily on gathering stories pertaining to the lived experiences of those involved in the NPLS program through one-on-one, semi structured, conversational interviews.
- Narrative analysis (9, 10) coupled with tenets of program theory and logic modeling (11,12) was used to conduct a qualitative program evaluation.

CULTURE SHIFT TOWARDS POLICY SHIFT

- Results highlight the perceived outcomes associated with the NPLS program (Figure 1).
- The program logic model illuminated a possible culture shift in school settings towards intrinsically valuing and endorsing outdoor play and learning.
- This research helps to contextualize the importance of the provision of naturalized play spaces for children, and importantly, related activities of engagement and knowledge mobilization.
- Results underline the need for the development of policy that supports the use of the outdoors as a critical space for play and learning.

ROOM FOR RESEARCH

- The purpose of this research was to identify, understand, and evaluate perceptions associated with naturalized playgrounds and the role they play in fostering nature connection, place meanings, and outcomes linked to individual and community wellbeing.

COLLABORATIVE PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

- Collaborations between university researchers and KidActive—a nationally registered charitable organization devoted to supporting the development of healthy children through outdoor play and learning.
- Study participants included stakeholders of KidActive’s Natural Play and Learning Spaces (NPLS) program.

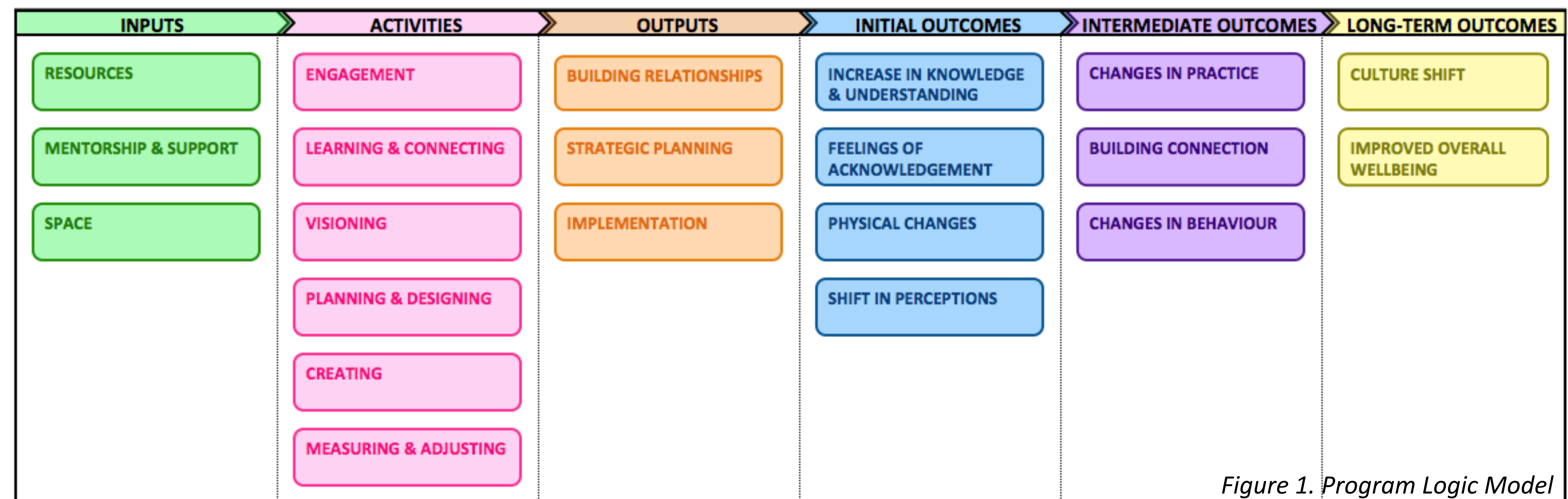


Figure 1. Program Logic Model

“...trying to move forward with some of these things was really a paradigm shift. It was trying to move from this safe kind of ‘put your kids in a bubble...don’t let them get hurt...you’re going to get sued’, into, ‘Let the kids play!’...So there has absolutely 100 percent been a culture shift when you start looking back and reflecting you think, ‘Wow, we’ve come a long way!’”

– Principal

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