Partnering for Outdoor Play
A case study of forest and nature school programming in the context of licensed childcare in Ottawa, Ontario

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Inconsistent implementation of rich outdoor, free-play opportunities in licensed childcare (Tanden, Saelens, & Christakis, 2015; Truelove, Vanderloo, & Tucker, 2017)

Inconsistent practitioner knowledge of play-based approaches (Rengel, 2013)

Missed opportunity for enhanced learning and well-being (Massey, 2005; Malone, 2012)

Many cultural factors underlie these inconsistencies (Gull Laird, et al., 2016)
Methodology

- **Collaborative Action Research** (Jacobs, 2017)
- **Appreciative Inquiry** (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2005; Stavros & Torres, 2006), and Collaborative Communication (CCP, n.d.)
- **Interpretive case study** (Stake, 1995)
The Partnership

Child & Nature Alliance of Canada

Andrew Fleck Children’s Services
“We believe that all children and youth should have the opportunity to play and learn in forests, parks, meadows, and mud puddles.”
The Partnership

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Andrew Fleck Children’s Services

“We support children and their families through high quality, inclusive services that meet their diverse developmental, early learning and child care needs”
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The Vision

- 5 days/week
- Full-day
- Licensed child care program
- Operating as an immersive forest-based early years program.
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The Challenge

- Operating a licensed child-care program in Ontario requires adherence to regulations under the Early Years Act.

- Implications for staffing, indoor facility design, outdoor play space.
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The Reality

- Regulatory challenges have led to program design compromises that allow for a pilot program to operate:
  - 3 days/week at licensed facility with “nearby nature” access
  - 2 days/week in immersive forest and nature school context
- With hopes to show “proof of concept” and inform policy development in support of outdoor play.
A Policy Ecosystem

People

Places

Programs

Parts
People

- Individual actors as champions
- Collaborative hope & action
- Social & ecological justice values
- Alignment of values, funding, and capacity
- Strategic organizational (and individual) mindfulness
Programs

- FNS pedagogy/policy links
- Regulatory landscape: square peg, round hole
- The forest and nature continuum
- Training and professional development for quality practice
- Assessing and managing risks
- Indigenous underpinnings
Places

- Indoor spaces
- Outdoor spaces
- Natural environments
- Human-made environments
Parts

- Personal gear
  - youth
  - adult
  - equity and access

- “Loose Parts”
  - provocations with natural objects
  - provocations with human-made objects
Next Steps

- Additional rounds of coding existing data for deeper analysis and member checking of codes, categories and themes.
- Migration of data into qualitative data analysis software to facilitate complexity of analysis across mixed media (text, images, video)
- Further data collection (?) and potential (re)scoping of case study to determine if further cycles of research are warranted.
References


