

Arkansas School-Age "LINKS"

May/June 2007

Page 1

ASU Childhood
Services

Jo Ann Nalley,
Director

PO Box 808
State University,
AR 72467
870-972-3055
1-888-429-1585

School-Age
"LINKS"
was compiled
and formatted
by
ASU Childhood
Services

Funded by
Arkansas
Department of Health
and Human Services
Division of Childcare
& Early Childhood
Education
Through the Child
Care
Development Funds



Taking Indoor Activities Outside for Maximum Summer Fun

(Excerpted and adapted with from *Developing and Operating Outdoor Interest Areas, Lesson Four*. Washington, DC: *Learning Options On-Line Course*, a joint project of NACCRA, The Values Group, and Roberta L. Newman. Copyright Roberta L. Newman, 1998.)

by Roberta L. Newman



School-age children need daily opportunities to exercise, relax, and participate in a wide range of outdoor activities. The hours children spend in out-of-school summer programs are often the best hours of the day for getting fresh air and enjoying the out of doors. Even if outdoor space is limited, regular participation in a wide variety of physical activities in the open air can help children develop healthy exercise habits that will last a lifetime. Children in most school-age programs have widely varying physical abilities, activity levels, skills, and interests. With this in mind, it is important to provide outdoor equipment and materials to support different levels of physical activity. To the extent possible, it is important to provide equipment and supplies to support the following kinds of physical activities:

-  **Team Sports** (e.g. baseball, kickball, soccer, field hockey, basketball, flag football, and others depending on space and facilities available.
-  **Large Group Games** (e.g. cooperative games, parachute games, tag games)

Inside this Edition:

Taking Indoor Activities Outside for Maximum Fun	1-11
Just Play... Or is it?	12-13
Activity Ideas	14-15
Arkansas Highlight A Look at the National Network of Statewide Networks Conference	16
NAA Conference Re-cap: A Spotlight on Moving Arkansas' School-Age Credential Forward	16

Taking Indoor Activities Outside

May/June 2007

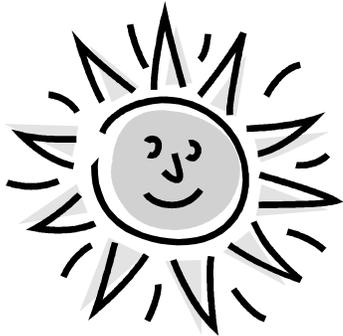
Page 2

 **Small Group Games and Activities** (e.g. small group cooperative games, ring toss, horse shoes, Double Dutch jump roping, tennis, fitness clubs like jogging or walking, relay races, obstacle courses)

 **Seasonal Activities** (e.g. activities related to gardening, hiking, changing seasons, etc.)

 **Individual Activities and Challenge Experiences** (e.g. jump roping, stilt walking, learning skills for different sports, balancing, baton twirling, hula hooping, opportunities where children set physical goals and work on physical skills – dribbling a ball, shooting free throws, rock climbing, running sprints, broad jumping, learning to putt, etc.).

But outdoors isn't just for physical activity; there are also limitless possibilities for turning your summer program "inside out!" With creativity and imagination, you can transform traditional indoor activities into terrific outdoor adventures! Use the following ideas and strategies to maximize outdoor fun for kids in your summer program.



Start Out Right – Analyze and Assess Your Outdoor Program Space

The amount and type of space available for outdoor experiences in school-age programs influences decisions about what kinds of activities can be offered. It is important to use a systematic process for assessing available space before planning outdoor experiences. Here are some planning questions to ask to determine the best and worst features of your outdoor space. Use the answers to these questions as a guide as you plan an outdoor environment that offers diverse physical activities as well as a variety of activities that are usually offered indoors.



PLANNING QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT YOUR OUTDOOR SPACE

? How large is your space? How many different areas exist? How many children can use the outdoor space safely at one time? Are all play areas located near each other or are they spread out? TIP: Use a large sheet of paper and make an approximate sketch of your outdoor environment, showing the relationship of different areas to each other and to the building.

? What permanent spaces, facilities, and equipment are already in place? Place a check by each item you have.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> climbers | <input type="checkbox"/> slides |
| <input type="checkbox"/> swings | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> sandbox area | <input type="checkbox"/> basketball goals |
| <input type="checkbox"/> places for privacy | <input type="checkbox"/> places for meetings |
| <input type="checkbox"/> stage or platform for plays or rehearsals | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> areas where children can experience nature | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> areas where children can conduct temporary activities | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> picnic tables | <input type="checkbox"/> open areas with grass |
| <input type="checkbox"/> hard surface area for building forts, setting up a tent, activities like basketball, having a campfire, etc. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> others? (list) _____ | |

Taking Indoor Activities Outside

May/June 2007

Page 3

- ? Are appropriate cushioning materials located under climbers, slides, see-saws, and swings? If not, what changes need to be made?
- ? What kind of storage space is available for equipment that must be put away daily (e.g. balls, bats, badminton set, roller skates, hula hoops, jump ropes, and more)? Outdoor shed? Outdoor closet? Indoor storage area? If no outdoor storage is available, can you make arrangements to develop or secure an outdoor storage area so that materials and supplies are conveniently located near play areas?
- ? How easy will it be to get back and forth between indoor and outdoor play areas? Where are the closest doors? Are there any safety hazards along the path between indoor and outdoor areas? Will any streets have to be crossed?
- ? Are there shaded areas that can provide shelter during hot, sunny weather or serve as a gathering place for quiet activities, snack, etc.
- ? Where is the closest source of water for outdoor activities? For getting a drink of water?
- ? Are there sheltered areas that could be used in rainy weather? (e.g. covered porticos?)
- ? What outdoor areas could be used for temporary outdoor interest areas (e.g. areas for dramatic play, arts and crafts, blocks and construction, cooking, relaxation, sand and water play, science and nature)? Refer back to your sketch of your outdoor space.
- ? Will other groups use any of the outdoor areas during your program hours? If yes, when? What arrangements need to be made about how you will share the space?
- ? What are the *best features* of the area available for outdoor activities? What ideas do you have for making the most of these features?
- ? What are the *worst features* of the area available for outdoor activities? What ideas do you have for working around or minimizing these features?

Ideas for Moving and Extending Indoor Interest Areas Outdoors

Having opportunities to participate in traditional indoor activities while outdoors can help children look at these activities with a fresh perspective that leads them to expand their interests. For example:

- Children who rarely spend time in the indoor art area, may be inspired by sights and sounds of outdoor life. If art materials are available outdoors, they may decide to try painting a landscape or cityscape, sketching flowers or trees, making a collage from natural or found objects, or drawing people they see doing outdoor activities.
- Other children who rarely sit down to read or write at formal indoor tables, may thoroughly enjoy the opportunity to write in a journal while relaxing on the ground under a tree.

Almost all activities that take place indoors can also be conducted outdoors. The results can be novel and pleasantly surprising when programs bring the indoors outside! Like indoor environments, outdoor environments can also be developed as a set of interest areas, each providing appropriate space, equipment, and materials to support activities related to the area. If permanent space is available, these areas can be built-in to the outdoor environment. If outdoor space is shared or limited in size, portable interest areas and kits can be developed for use in the space.

Although it may not be possible to provide extensions of all indoor interest areas every day, it is a good idea to include several of these areas outdoors each day. This gives children an alternative to active physical play while outdoors.



Taking Indoor Activities Outside

May/June 2007

Page 4

Most operating tips for indoor interest areas are also applicable to the areas when they are moved outdoors. However, there are some additional things to think about when you move outdoors:

-  How many areas is it reasonable to offer, given the amount of time and space available?
-  How much equipment should be provided when areas are moved outdoors? Should items be rotated?
-  Who will decide what to bring outdoors – staff, children, or both?
-  Who will decide what to bring outdoors – staff, children, or both?
-  How will wind, humidity, and heat affect some activities? What adjustments might be necessary?
-  Are there distractions like nearby traffic that may affect the areas? How can distractions be limited?
-  Will insects or other creatures affect how the areas are set up and operated?

If access to outdoor storage sheds or closets is available, many items associated with indoor interest areas can be kept on shelves or boxes in the outdoor storage area or hung from the walls. If a program does not have access to outdoor storage areas, items can be transported back and forth between the indoor and outdoor environment. Staff and children can work together to move selected equipment and materials in and out of the building and use it to create temporary outdoor interest areas.

When the outdoor environment is well-designed and well-managed, children thrive on opportunities to develop a wide variety of skills, talents, and abilities while working and playing in the out of doors. In order to maximize the potential for providing children with positive outdoor experiences, it is necessary to take a creative and thoughtful approach to planning and organizing the outdoor environment. Here some tips for transforming indoor interest areas into successful outdoor experiences.

BOARD AND TABLE GAMES INTEREST AREA

- Set up picnic tables (or portable tables) with selected board and table games.
- Choose games that will not be easily disturbed by wind (e.g. Checkers, Chinese Checkers, Chess, Dominoes, Connect Four, Mancala).
- Avoid games like Monopoly that use paper money and cards that could easily be blown away.



MANIPULATIVES INTEREST AREA

- In calm weather, set up one or more tables with building materials such as Legos, Duplos, Flexiblocks, Tinker Toys, Jenga, Magnastiks, and/or Lincoln Logs – use plastic tubs to transport building materials to and from the indoor *Manipulatives Interest Area*.
- In calm weather, set up a table for model building. Use plastic tubs to transport items.



QUIET AREA/COMFORT ZONE

- Spread outdoor blankets near bushes or under shade trees to create comfortable areas where children can visit with friends, read a book or magazine, listen to music or play quiet games.
- Provide a portable CD/cassette player (headphones optional) for listening to music and stories. Use baskets or tubs to transport items such as selected books, magazines, quiet games (e.g. game designed for auto travel), brainteaser puzzles, battery powered cassette or CD players, selected CDs or cassette tapes of music or favorite stories, notepads and pencils for writing poems, stories, letters, etc. Involve children in selecting materials, transporting them, and setting up the area.

Taking Indoor Activities Outside

May/June 2007

Page 5

BLOCK AND CONSTRUCTION INTEREST AREA

- Designate some paved surfaces for building with unit blocks. Use boxes or plastic laundry baskets and wagons to transport blocks and block props outdoors.
- Designate an area for building temporary club-houses or forts. Provide crates, large appliance cartons, boards, planks, and large pieces of fabric (e.g. sheets or bedspreads).
- Designate an area for building with hollow wooden blocks. Involve interested children in moving the blocks to the outdoor area or store them in a nearby outdoor closet. Take pictures of children's creations and post on the indoor bulletin board.



LARGE MOVEMENT INTEREST AREA

- Designate a place for aerobics activities. Provide a battery powered CD Player, CDs, and props for children to use in creating their routines.
- Designate a regular meeting place for fitness club meetings. Provide pads and pens for children to chart their progress.
- Designate an area for movement skill stations where one or two interested children can work regularly on skills related to various sports (e.g. throwing, jumping, passing, kicking, balancing, dribbling, etc.)

SAND AND WATER TABLE AREA

- Designate a paved area for sand and water play. Move portable sand and water tables and/or tubs outside.
- Provide aprons and a variety of selected water play and sand props from an indoor *Sand and Water Play* area. Transport props in several plastic tubs so that children can easily see what

is available. Involve children in selecting and transporting props.

- Reserve one section of the area for bubble blowing activities. Provide a variety of props for outdoor bubble blowing. Include a book on how to blow different kinds of bubbles.

ARTS AND CRAFTS INTEREST AREA

- Set up easels outdoors and provide easel painting and chalk activities. Provide easel paper, tempera paints, and chalk.
- Set up water color painting activities at picnic tables – provide water colors, paper, and brushes.
- Set up drawing activities at picnic tables or on the ground under shade trees. Provide drawing tablets, crayons, pens, pencils, markers of different sizes, something to sit on, and blankets and lap trays if activities take place on the ground.
- Collect collage materials from the out of doors (leaves, seeds, pods, bark, twigs, nuts, etc.). Provide paper or Styrofoam trays and glue.
- Designate an area for sidewalk art. Provide large chunks of colored chalk.
- Designate a wall or concrete area for water art. Provide squirt bottles and large paint brushes for creating murals.
- Create a natural loom by stringing rope, vines, or jute between two trees. Encourage children to weave with materials found outdoors (grasses, weeds, vines, bark, etc. Be sure to check vines to be sure they are not poison ivy, poison oak, or other toxic plants.



Taking Indoor Activities Outside

May/June 2007

Page 6

- Rotate the use of different theme oriented Prop Boxes outdoors and/or invite children to make their own selections of Prop Boxes for use outdoors. Involve children in transporting the boxes.
- Rotate other dramatic play props and equipment based on children's interests (e.g. on certain days, bring out puppets and the puppet stage or transport selected dress up clothes or dolls in laundry tubs). Involve children in making these selections and in helping to transport the items.
- Encourage children to use the designated area for playing theater games like charades.
- Provide a table with equipment and materials for exploring and investigating nature – magnifying glasses; binoculars; bug catchers; books and charts for identifying birds, insects, flowers, trees; rulers and tape measures.

SCIENCE, MATH, AND NATURE INTEREST AREA

- Provide a table with equipment and materials for exploring and investigating nature – magnifying glasses; binoculars; bug catchers; books and charts for identifying birds, insects, flowers, trees; rulers and tape measures.
- Set up a weather station. Provide thermometers; barometers; supplies for testing water, measuring rainfall, etc.
- Provide containers and plastic bags for children to use for collecting objects from nature (rocks, dried leaves and flowers, seeds, pods, shells, etc.) display natural objects to examine: abandoned bird nests, wasp and bee hives, snake skins, feathers, egg casings, etc.
- Provide a table for projects and experiments with light and sound (e.g. materials for making and using walkie-talkies, mirror for experiments with light, etc.).
- Designate an area for bird feeders, birdhouses, and birdbaths. Provide activities that encourage children to make bird food recipes, replenish feeders and birdbaths, observe the behavior of birds, etc.

LIBRARY/COMPUTER/HOMEWORK INTEREST AREA

(Provide a homework area for children who attend Summer School part of the day.)

- Locate a portable table and bench near the *Library/Computer/Homework Area*. Designate this table as a place where children may work on homework that can be done outdoors.
- Provide a tub or basket of basic materials such as dictionary, paper, notepads, pens, pencils, staple, paper clips, markers, etc.
- Invite children to select their own resource materials and books and take responsibility for bringing them to the area designated for doing homework outdoors. Encourage them not to take out materials that could easily blow away on windy days. Post a sign-out chart in the indoor area where children can indicate which materials they have taken outdoors.
- Be sure to reserve the table for homework; redirect children who are not doing homework to other areas.



WOODWORKING INTEREST AREA

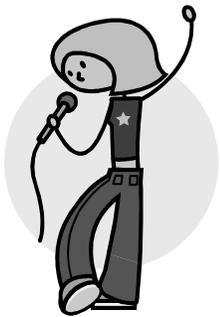
- Designate a paved area or other flat surfaced area for woodworking.
- Provide woodworking benches.
- Transport selected equipment and materials and supplies in tubs or bins. Organize bins by type of materials to help children locate equipment and materials easily.
- Rotate materials available to reduce the amount to be transported each day (e.g. provide wood on some days, cardboard on other days). *Always provide protective eye goggles.*
- Avoid use of lightweight items for collages that may blow away (e.g. small pieces of wood, shavings, toothpicks, etc.)

Taking Indoor Activities Outside

May/June 2007

Page 7

- Invite local expert wood carvers to give outdoor wood caring demonstrations in the area.
- Encourage children to work on projects that can be used outdoors – bird feeders, birdhouses, and boats for water play, large projects like outdoor forts or clubhouses.
- Provide close oversight and concentrated supervision just as you do for indoor woodworking. Review safety rules and develop additional safety guidelines that might be needed in your outdoor space.



MUSIC INTEREST AREA

- Designate an area for music, preferably near shade (or covered area), a table for displaying instruments, and a paved area suitable for movement and dancing.
- Provide a battery powered CD/cassette player (may need to share with other areas). Provide a basket of selected CDs/cassettes for dancing, singing, and using with instruments.
- Provide a basket or bin of props (scarves, streamers) for use during movement/dance.
- Rotate the use of different sets of musical instruments for exploration outdoors. Involve children in selecting which instruments they would like to use outdoors. Transport instruments in a portable music center or in tubs, boxes, or baskets. Be sure to handle instruments with care to avoid damage.
- Collect items from nature that make interesting sounds and display them for exploration in the area. Use them to create “musical nature collages”.

- On occasion, set up a Karaoke sing-a-long machine or other microphone and sound system and encourage children to perform for others in the outdoor environment.
- Use the area as a base for music activities like songfests (accompanied by a ukulele, autoharp, portable keyboard), street band practice, movement and dance activities, outdoor “mini-concerts” by special visitors who sing, play the guitar or conga drum, etc.

PROJECT AND HOBBY INTEREST AREA

- If possible store projects in progress from outdoor interest areas in an outdoor shed or closet.
- Consider setting up areas for ongoing group or individual projects outdoors. For example:
 - ⇒ Create a large loom with rope or twine strung between two trees. Encourage children to weave on the loom throughout the week, using objects from nature like reeds, grasses, dried weeds and flowers, seed pods, milk pods, and other vines. *Use caution in identifying materials; be sure not to select vines like poison ivy or oak for weaving!*
 - ⇒ Get permission to create a mural on a wall or other permanent structure on or near the program. Involve children in designing the mural, selecting colors, and doing the actual painting over a period of a week or more.
 - ⇒ Take pictures of outdoor works in progress as they develop. Post them on the indoor bulletin board or send them to local newspapers with an article.



Taking Indoor Activities Outside

May/June 2007

Page 8

COOKING INTEREST AREA

- Designate a shaded area with a table and easy access to water for drinking and hand washing. Provide containers for disposing of trash. Provide sanitizer wet wipes.
- Use picnic baskets and coolers to transport and store food items and supplies.
- Use the area for self-made snack preparation, using no bake recipes for easy preparation. Try additional activities if a grill is available.
- On occasion, use the area to hold special picnics or camp style cookouts.
- Avoid setting out food for long periods during hot weather when food may spoil quickly.
- Assess whether yellow jackets and other pests will affect cooking and picnicking activities.



Ideas for Extending and Expanding Outdoor Interest Areas

In addition to providing areas for different physical activities and moving indoor interest areas activities outdoors, staff can work with school-age children to create additional challenging and exciting outdoor interest areas. Many interest areas can be expanded to include ongoing activities that can become lifelong hobbies and vocations. Here are some examples:

GARDEN PLOT

(Extension of the *Science, Math, and Nature Interest Area*)

Projects growing seedlings and plants can be used to launch an extensive garden area. The garden can be used to beautify an outdoor area and to provide a harvest of flowers, vegetables, and herbs that can be used for a variety of projects. Here are some ideas for developing and operating an ongoing garden plot:

- Recruit parent or community volunteers to work with children to prepare the soil for gardening.
- Contact your local garden club for help in designing and planting your garden. Invite a representative to meet with the children. Consider projects to create special areas in the garden such as sitting areas, fishponds, or water fountains. (Local and state garden clubs sometimes provide mini-grants for projects.)
- Provide a variety of garden tools and supplies: shovels, hoes, rakes, trowels, gloves, seeds, seedlings, and materials to prepare the soil properly for your area and for what you want to grow (e.g. fertilizer, peat moss, root stimulator, top soil).
- Plant, weed, maintain, and harvest the garden regularly. Enlist the support of volunteers when the program is not in session.
- Create a garden club. Have members make plans for harvesting various garden products and using them for activities such as:
 - ⇒ Preparing special snacks and meals in the program (vegetable stews, salads, snacks)
 - ⇒ Creating fresh and dried flower arrangements – selling them as a fundraising project, or giving them as gifts.
 - ⇒ Drying herbs for seasoning, fragrance, and display – selling them as a fundraising project, giving them as gifts.
 - ⇒ Celebrating the success of your garden by inviting parents and others to a harvest festival, complete with floral display, food, and music.



Taking Indoor Activities Outside

May/June 2007

Page 10

CAMPGROUND

(Expansion of the *Dramatic Play Interest Area*)

Camping out is an activity many school-age children enjoy with family and friends on weekends and vacations. By creating an outdoor campground area, you can make it possible for children to explore a wide variety of camping activities during program hours. Here are a few suggestions for working with children to set up a special campground area for outdoor dramatic play:

- Designate an area where children can set up tents or other temporary camping structures each day. If possible, select an area that is at least partially shady. Work with children to decide which area to use for tents and which area to use for group activities like camp sing-a-longs, cooking, campfires, etc. (NOTE: These suggestions refer to cooking and campfires as playacting. Depending on the scope of your program, facilities available, and maturity of the children using the campground, you may want to consider setting up the area for actual cooking activities or campfires on occasion.)
- Provide 2 or 3 person tents that children can learn how to set up and take down by themselves. Another idea for creating tents is to provide different lengths and connecting joints of PVC tubing (available from building supply stores) that children can join together to make frameworks for tent-like structures. When the frameworks are built, you can drape them with sheets, bedspreads or other large pieces of fabric. The frameworks can be set up and taken down daily.
- Provide outdoor blankets and/or sleeping bags for use on tent floors. If possible, provide small folding camping chairs and tables.
- Stock a portable prop box with a wide variety of camping props for dramatic play (e.g. camping cookware and utensils; camping dishes; backpacks; canteens; compass; camping rain gear; hiking maps and field guides; binoculars and magnifying glasses for exploring nature; small camera and film; books and magazines on camping and hiking, flashlight or battery style lanterns, etc.).

- Expand the use of the area by using it for a Camping Club for children who want to learn more about camping experiences. Invite representatives from camping organizations, youth hostels, Boy Scouts, or other groups with expertise in camping to visit with children about camping experiences. Hold weekly special events related to camping in the area: picnics, cookouts, storytelling, sing-a-longs, etc.
- Organize a field trip to a local camp site, nature park, or hiking trails to learn more about camping.

FORT AREA

(Expansion of the *Building and Construction* and *Woodworking Interest Areas*)

School-age children love to create forts, shelters, and clubhouses where they can gather with friends, have club meetings, work on special projects. Children often use the forts they build to extend their own creative dramatic play activities. If you have a large outdoor space, you may want to designate an area for fort building. Here are some tips for developing and operating an outdoor *Fort Building Interest Area*.

- Use the outdoor *Woodworking Interest Area* as a base for operations; expand the scope of the area with tools and materials suitable for large projects.
- Select an area with both sun and shade for building.
- Solicit donations of wood and other building supplies from local lumber or building supply stores.
- Recruit volunteers with architectural, construction, and woodworking skills to lead sessions of a weekly *Builder's Club* where children can develop ideas and learn more about design and construction. Consider inviting local zoning officials and building inspectors to talk with the children about their jobs.
- Encourage children to think carefully about the purpose of their forts – what they want to do there – how the forts will be used.

Taking Indoor Activities Outside

May/June 2007

Page 9

- Have children go through the process of getting a site approved for their forts and complete drawings or sketches of their structures before they begin to build. Some children may want to build models of their forts as part of the planning process. Consider issuing “fort building permits” based on site approval and drawings. Involve children in establishing the permit guidelines and issuing the permits.
- Provide close oversight and concentrated supervision as children work with woodworking and construction tools.
- Once forts are completed, organize a fort tour; invite other children in the program, parents, and others in the community to visit.
- Use the completed forts as an extension of the dramatic play area. Help children create furniture and other items to make the forts comfortable and inviting.
- Document the fort building in progress with photographs; post these on one of your indoor bulletin boards for parents and others to enjoy. Send photos to the local newspaper, along with a story about fort building activities.

BIRD SANCTUARY

(Expansion of the *Science, Math, and Nature Interest Area*)

If children enjoy learning about and caring for indoor pets in your indoor *Science, Math, and Nature Interest Area*, consider building on their interest in living things by creating a bird sanctuary.

Here are some ideas for setting up a bird sanctuary where children can observe the habits of birds that are drawn to the area:

- Designate an area for the sanctuary near bushes and trees. (If possible, choose an area that is located near windows so that children can also observe birds while indoors).
- Involve children in creating the bird sanctuary. Research the feeding and nesting habits of birds in your area. Use the information to select or make appropriate birdfeeders, shelters, and bird

houses. Have children make bird food – get recipes from nature groups such as the Audubon Society, local birding clubs, department of cooperative extension, National Wildlife Federation, and children’s nature books or magazines. Some birds also like food scraps such as spaghetti, bread, crackers, popcorn, and raisins – save some of these items and spread them in certain areas of the bird sanctuary.

- Select one or two quiet spots for birdbaths. Work with the children to make birdbaths from recycled materials (e.g. large pie tins, roasting pans, or a garbage can lid). Keep the birdbaths supplied with fresh water.
- Collect items that birds can use to build nests and place them near feeders or birdbaths (e.g. scraps of yarn, string, and thread; pieces of ribbon or fabric; items from nature such as twigs, dried grasses, leaves, and weeds; and more).
- Provide a portable container with bird field guides, laminated bird identifier cards, several pairs of binoculars, small camera and film.
- Once the bird sanctuary is set up, be sure to clean and replenish feeders and birdbaths regularly. Birds will be counting on you!
- Start a *Bird Watching Club*. Invite a local ornithologist to talk with children about how to observe and track birds, how to recognize different bird songs, how to do bird calls, investigate abandoned bird nests, etc.
- Plan a field trip to a local zoo or nature center for bird watching activities.



Just Play...Or Is It?

by Stacy Dykstra

Working in the profession of school-age care is challenging, rewarding, and frustrating. The casual observer may think the children in our care “just play.” It is paramount for our profession that society understands the value of the activities and experiences of children during out-of-school time.

It is vital for children to engage in quality play experiences during their out-of-school time for healthy growth and development.

The goal of education should be to stimulate the development of each individual and improve life and society for all members by providing quality educational experiences. The opportunities afforded in quality school-age programs contribute to this process. Out-of-school time is an important part of a child’s life. It is vital for children to engage in quality play experiences during their out-of-school time for healthy growth and development.

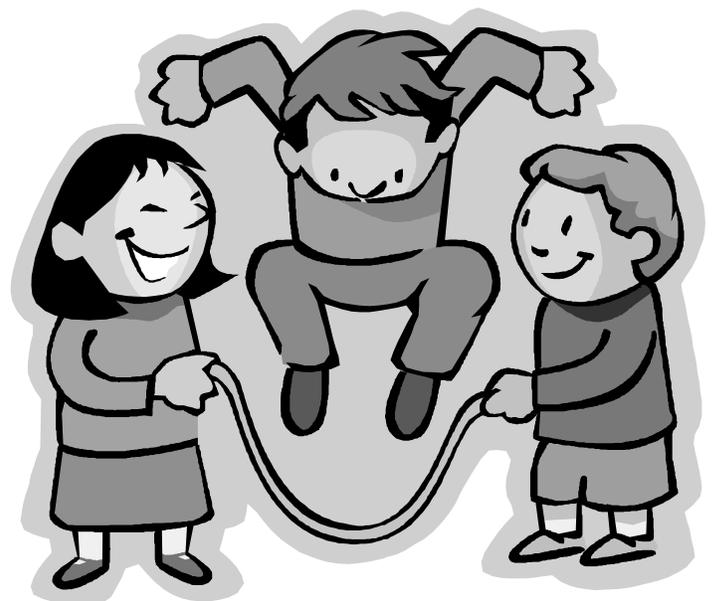
In our program, children are free to make choices about how to spend their time each day among four or five areas. Within each area, there are a variety of opportunities for children to grow and develop. Children challenge their minds, stimulate their creativity, develop their bodies, practice their social skills, and feel a variety of emotions each day in our program. Providing choice for each child enables him to investigate his work with intention. He uses his existing knowledge as a building block for new meaning. The program provides an environment of security while encouraging his free exploration.

As I wander through the 70-student program, I see small groups, large groups, and individuals “plugged in” to their activities. In the “clubhouse” children re-engaged in small group and individual activities. Two third-grade girls have set up a fortune-telling booth. They decide to include all children who want to participate because “that’s only fair.” A group of first and fourth grade children are sponge painting. One them begins to write a story about her creation and stops momentarily to share it with me. Four first-grade boys

are engrossed in dramatic play with building materials. They share with each other how their “spaceships” work. A fourth grade girls is reading a book in the tent. A “family grill” is being established by another group. After taking orders, they realize they need a menu. Co-operatively, the design a menu of basic foods with creative names such as “chip off the old block” for a side order of chips. The last group, fifth graders, have used paper to create a design. They ask other children and staff members to try and recreate it.

The children originate, plan, and implement the activities in which they participate. They solve problems, take risks, negotiate, inquire, experiment, participate in dialogue, interact, appreciate multiple perspectives, and most importantly, feel valued through their play experiences in our program. The staff follows the lead of the children by asking thoughtful questions, maintaining safety, and supporting their endeavors – both successes and failures. Supplies are provided for the children to use as they work toward the construction of personal knowledge. The adult-child relationship at our program is transactional in nature. Everyone in the program, staff and children, learn and develop each day together.

To the outsiders these activities may be “just play,” even chaotic play. To me it’s learning at its finest.



A Need to Play

A Review of the Literature

Editor's Note: A review of our own back issues reveals that almost every year we've published articles emphasizing the need for play and how children learn from play. The "Just Play" article on the front page originally appeared in our July 1998 issue. Yet we see a continuing trend, that started over 30 years ago, that minimizes play in favor of structured academics. Over the years many others have warned of the consequences of reducing play opportunities. We encourage our readers to use these quotes to advocate more strongly for children's free play.

30 Years Ago...

"When early learning is defined as being only academic learning, play is often taken out of the curriculum to achieve these goals. The elementary school years have traditionally valued "work" in the classroom and have relegated play to recess time only. Kindergarten teachers are reporting that with increasing emphasis on accountability for reaching early academic objectives, there is now less time for play in their classrooms. And often the movement toward "educational" content in the preschools is interpreted in ways which cause downgrading or even abandonment of play time in the preschools as well."

Doris Bergen
Play as a Learning Medium (1974)

"During middle childhood...age 6 to 11, play affects [the] development of problem-solving and creative thinking abilities, communicative and expressive skills, mathematical and scientific knowledge, emotional maturity, and social competencies."

—Doris Bergen



15 Years Ago...

"During the years since [1974 when] *Play as a Learning Medium* was published, the pressures on children to achieve academically in a work-like (or workbook-like!) school environment have not diminished. More over, many school-age children have pressure-filled schedules that monopolize their after-school time as well. The day care and early education programs that stress structured academic learning and omit free play-time is also evidence that...the value of play is minimized."

Doris Bergen
Play as a Medium for Learning and Development (1988)

"...the skills developed in their social fantasy worlds probably help children immeasurably to become competent game players and citizens in their real worlds..."

- Kenneth H. Rubin
Play as a Medium for Learning and Development

The Language of Kids

"Play is the language of kids. Play is the way kids explore their world, the way they communicate, the way they work out problems and feel a sense of mastery. Play is the way kids grow, learn, and live. Healthy play is an extremely powerful tool in producing quality kids; cooperative, open, optimistic, loving... kids."

Jim Therrell

"Play is an experience and attitude of 'Let's explore and create an experience where everyone feels a sense of joy, a tingly sensation through the synergy of cooperation, and a desire that says 'Let's just adapt and do it for the sake of doing it!'"

— Jim Therrell
How to Play with Kids (1992)

Activity Ideas

May/June 2007

Page 14

As the school year winds down and summer start-up is in full swing, thoughts about new and clever activity ideas that school-age youth will enjoy might be a top priority for your school-age program as you focus on quality program offerings. Here are a couple of activity ideas to try out!

Treasures of Sand

If the possibilities of planning a field trip to the beach are out the question, why not bring the beach to your program! Here is a way to make sand creations that you can keep without leaving home.

What You Need

- 3 cups of sand (If you don't have "beach sand," you can buy "play sand" at a hardware store)
- 1 1/2 cup of cornstarch
- 1 1/2 cup of water
- Newspaper
- Old cooking pot
- Large spoon



How To Make It

1. Mix the ingredients together in the pot. If you mix the corn starch and sand prior to adding the water, you can avoid the corn starch from clumping,
2. Cook the mixture over low heat, stirring constantly.
3. When it gets thick, take it off of the stove and let it cool.
4. Once it is cool, use the spoon to turn it out on the newspaper.
5. Now you can make it into any shape you like, let it dry, and keep your creation forever!
6. If you are interested in using sand castle molds, a quick spray of cooking spray into the molds helps the sand pop right out of the sand castle molds once dry. Make sure you pack the sand mixture in tightly and leave a small air space at the opening end of the mold. To remove from mold, slam the mold down on a hard surface. The extra air and lubrication will help the sand castle pop right out.
7. Consider buying small decorations to accessorize your house. Some things to consider include, round glass stones (the type used for flower vases), shells, flags (like those used for cupcake decorations) etc. The possibilities are endless so use your imagination!

Creating a Box Compass

Whether you are gearing up to explore the outdoor elements in your backyard, playground, a nature trail or your local park, having a sense of direction is important. Providing school-age youth the opportunity to create a compass, is a first step to helping children stay on the right track!

What You Need

- Square box with sides no more than 2" high (bottom of a half-gallon milk carton will do)
- Cardboard circle small enough to lay flat in bottom of box
- 1 1/2" nail with head
- 1 large paper clip, straightened
- Compass Rose Template (click to download a PDF file by visiting http://www.mariner.org/educationalad/ageofex/actv_one_teacher.php)
- Magnet
- Glue or tape

How to Make

1. Pierce the center of the box bottom with the 1 1/2 inch nail from the bottom up into the box.
2. Take the straightened paperclip and compass to the diameter of your compass rose. If longer, trim.
3. Rub the paper clip against a magnet for several minutes.
4. Glue or tape wire to the cardboard circle slightly off center.
5. On the same side, mark center of cardboard circle and pierce halfway through, place cardboard circle on point of nail in box. Let circle settle. It will turn gently until one end of the needle points to the north.
6. Create a compass rose by either printing the example template or drawing your own. It should be the size of your cardboard circle.
7. Glue the compass rose to the cardboard circle with the fleur de lis placed where the needle end points-north.

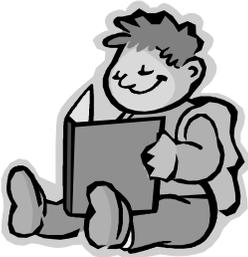
Activity Ideas

May/June 2007

Page 15

Activities for Making up Stories

Whether a story is heard or told, a “good story” can send a child’s imagination into places yet to be discovered and can open the door for further exploration and creativity. Above all, activities like the ones described below, can allow both adults and children to laugh a lot and have fun!



Fortunately/Unfortunately

This activity is aided by a bag of props. The first person starts telling a story, bringing it to a cliffhanger. Then the second person takes the bag of props and says, “... but fortunately ...” and pulls out an object, then finds a way for the hero to save herself using that object. Then just as it looks like everything is fine in the story, Person #3 says “... but unfortunately ...” and takes something from the bag, something that will cause a problem for the hero. It keeps going until there are no more objects.

What kind of objects should you use? Anything that is small and interesting: a ball, a rubber band, string, a spatula, a hat ... anything will work if you have a good imagination! You will be amazed in what direction the stories will go!



Wacky Headlines

What you Need:

- small slips of paper, pencils, paper bags or baskets

How to play:

Bag #1 On a piece of paper, each person writes an adjective. These words should be good describers — “enormous,” “slippery” or “bright blue” are more useful than “neat,” “nice” or “good.” Those slips go into paper bag or basket #1. For children that do not know what an adjective is, simply tell them that adjectives are “describing” words. Pick something in your program and ask them to describe it and choose some of the words that they use in their descriptions.

Bag #2 Repeat the same process for the remaining steps by writing each of the types of words requested on different strips of paper. Next brainstorm, a kind of person or animal, the quirkiest the better! “Hippopotamus,” “superhero” or “princess” are good examples. These go in bag #2.

Bag #3 Brainstorm action words (present tense works best). “Jumps,” “howls” or “grabs” would work. These go in Bag #3.

Bag #4 Brainstorm nouns (singular or plural) For example, “flowers,” “sheep” or “police cars.” These go in Bag #4.

Now, without looking, pull one slip of paper out of each bag, and put them in a line horizontally, 1-4. You now have your wacky headline! You’ can brainstorm from these four words funny stories to tell, pictures to draw, etc. If you don’t like the words you picked, draw others from the bag. You may need to add a word or two on occasion to help it make sense, but encourage the children to do this.



Arkansas Spotlight

May/June 2007

Page 16



arkansas out of school network
creating safe, healthy and enriching experiences for arkansas youth

Senior Policy Analyst with Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families (AACF), Paul Kelly participated in a panel discussion regarding how to build partnerships and deepen relationships on both sides of the aisle during times of political change. His extensive background and expertise in this area, served workshop attendees well as the panel was able to share tips and techniques on how to keep from aligning too closely with the party in power and build bipartisan support to keep an agenda progressing through future political transition. AOSN is fortunate to have Paul as a staff to the network as the issue of after school and summer programming continues to strengthen on the state's agenda.

The 19th Annual National Afterschool Association (NAA) soared to new heights this year when over 3,000 afterschool professionals, speakers, and exhibitors met in Phoenix to learn the latest information and gain access to those who are on the cutting edge of research, theory, and practice in the afterschool community. Amongst the over 330 professional development opportunities that took place at the three-day conference, during one workshop session, Arkansas was able to offer insight into the work we as a state has been doing regarding the development of a School-Age Credential. Woodie Sue Herlein, Program Coordinator for the AR School-Age Quality Initiative Project with Arkansas State University Childhood Services, took part in a panel discussion with other professionals from South Dakota, Massachusetts, and Connecticut to highlight each of the state's efforts in the implementation of a School-Age Credential. A credential is defined as a certification that recognizes an individual's performance based on a set of defined skills and knowledge. In the out of school time realm, a credential provides youth workers an opportunity to establish a career path and gain professional recognition for demonstrating competence on the job. During the course of the panel discussions, participants learned that states have each taken varying approaches to implementing a SA Credential. Though not being currently implemented, the stage has been set for the launching of a SA Credential in Arkansas. After having looked at other successful models, including the Military School Age Credential, and work done by the Council of Professional Recognition (the administering agent of the CDA), Arkansas has developed the content for its own state School-Age Credential. With the content development phase behind us, the new challenges faced are a result of more logistical questions that have begun to emerge regarding statewide infrastructure needs to support the credential, who will serve as the credentialing agent, funding issues, etc. An invigorated movement within the state has made the timing ideal for movement in the implementation of a state school-age credential. As a result of a movement towards quality school-age programming as identified in the state accreditation system, the development and future launching of a state quality rating system (QRS) that will include school-age programs, a new Governor who has chosen to put the topic of out of school time programs on his agenda and allow for the creation of a task force to look at the opportunities associated with afterschool and summer programs, and the work of the AOSN network regarding the importance of access to quality school-age professional development opportunities, no time is better for the ball to continue to roll forward in the full implementation of a School-Age Credential in Arkansas. Stay tuned for more information!

