

A vibrant, multi-level playroom with children engaged in various activities. In the foreground, a child is painting on a large sheet of paper. In the middle ground, a child is playing a drum set. In the background, a child is reading a book. The room is filled with colorful toys, books, and artwork, creating a rich and stimulating environment.

# Playful Learning Environments

# Gameplan

- Think about how to use the learning environment to foster playful learning
- Look at examples of indoor and outdoor playful learning environments
- Consider risky play
- Connect all of this to the PoP Practices

Daydream a little...

Using your play kit materials, make a model of your ideal playful learning environment, or a space that fostered playful learning for you when you were a child.

What are some words that describe this space?

# Part 1: Indoor Playful Learning Environments

Reggio Emilia, Italy

*The environment is the third teacher*

Image from 'Children, Spaces, Relations – Metaproject for an Environment for Young Children' © Preschools and Infant-toddler Centers – Istituzione of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia, Italy, published by Reggio Children, 1998









## WELCOME!

A playful learning environment is a safe place that fosters **choice**, **wonder** and **delight**, enabling children to engage in deeper, more meaningful learning through play. It makes visible connections between children's lives and curricular studies/school.



A playful environment **incorporates:**

- **access**
- **comfort**
- **agency** (learners making decisions)
- **flexibility**

When might I use this tool?

- at the beginning of the year
- at the beginning of a unit
- when looking for classroom management ideas
- .....



This framework/tool is the result of collaborative research between the Kindergarten and Primary Playful Environment Study Groups, and the Project Zero research team. It is intended to help learners and educators think about their learning environments, pose questions about whether they are supporting playful learning, and consider concepts that might enhance the environment in playful ways.



## PLANNING PLAYFUL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS



*A tool by educators,  
for educators*



## REFLECT...

...on your environment before you start.  
Use the Play Spaces to add your own ideas.

## Who uses this space?



Who are the learners in this space?  
Who else uses the space?  
Are their cultures and languages represented?  
Are there particular learners to keep in mind?

## How can the environment support learning through play?



## CONSIDER...

...how the following environmental elements can support learning through play by fostering **choice**, **wonder** and **delight**



## 1 Do the furnishings and arrangement offer...?

- **flexibility** to move chairs, tables, cushions
- **novelty**: furnishings/arrangement change sometimes
- **variety** of work areas, centers
- **comfortable** surroundings
- ways to make learning visible

## Play Space

## 2 Are you able to use the architecture...?

- **flexibly** such as opening doors, partitions
- **creatively** by using fixed architectural features in novel or **playful** ways

## 3 Are the materials...?

- **open-ended**
- **natural**
- **authentic**
- **novel**
- **appealing** to the senses
- **connected** to learner's lives/unit of study
- supportive of learner's **independence** (e.g.charts, visual scaffolds)
- supportive of **dramatic play**

## Play Space

## 4 Does the storage...?

- make materials **visible and accesible** at learner's height?
- have space to store **works-in-progress**
- have a clear **organization**



## 5 Do the aesthetics of the space feel playful?

- colors, sounds, light, textures

# Part 2: Outdoor Playful Learning Environments

“We go outside to have fun, to get our energy out, and to find problems we have to solve”

Quote from an Opal School 5<sup>th</sup> grader

NATIONAL BESTSELLER

# Last Child *in the* Woods

SAVING OUR CHILDREN FROM  
NATURE-DEFICIT DISORDER

UPDATED  
AND  
EXPANDED

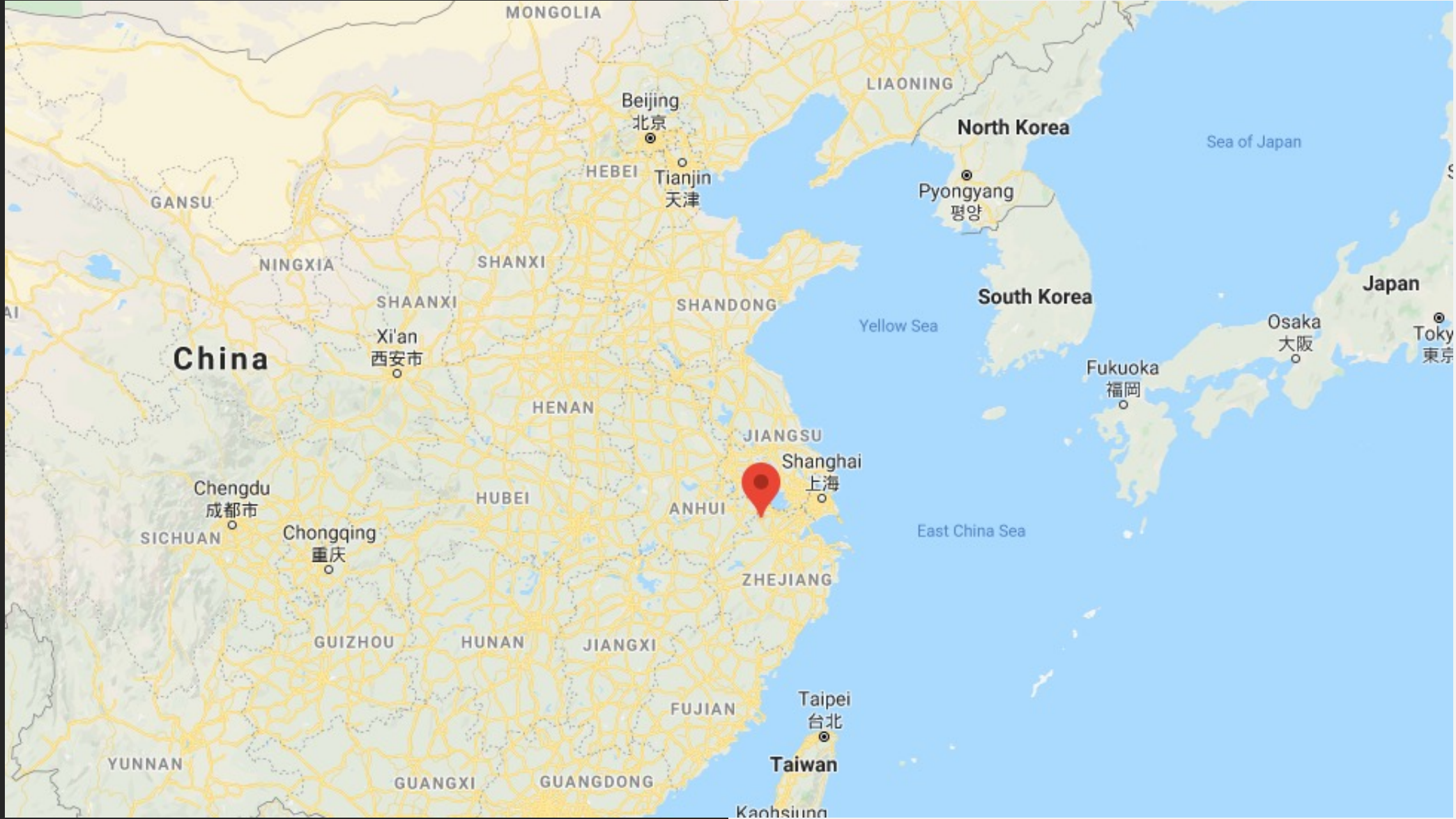


RICHARD LOUV

RECIPIENT OF THE 2008 AUDUBON MEDAL

# Example One: Anji Play's Zip Line

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Teacher: Outside we played with this again. I saw that many of you were really interested in the zip line. And we have shared and talked about it before too. Today when you were playing with the zip line did you have any new discoveries.



T: OK Wenze Sun come tell us what you think. Do you need me to put up your record/note?

Wenze Sun: Yes



Wenze Sun: When I was playing on the zip line. When I was in the beginning, at the bottom. The zip line hit into it. When it hit into it, into each other. And then went backwards. Pushed.

T: Did you understand what he said?

Children: No!!!

C2: I understood.

T: Do you want to tell us again. A little clearer this time. Please step forward, you don't need to stand so far back.



Wenzu Sun: Every time after I played on the zip line, when I was at the end of the zip line. The thing that hit into the zip line, You know, the black part at the bottom.



T: Is this what he is talking about? Is this the place?





T: Thank you. So whoever has understood Wenzhe Sun's discovery, Can they tell us in the most simple and clear language. I'm going to invite (points to a child)

C3: What he is saying is this. When this piece of zip line hits here it will come back.



C4: I have seen it, how the wheels inside, when they hit into the wheels turn backwards and it moves backward. Because that part is higher, they [the wheels] roll forward.

T: Oh, so you saw that there are two wheels inside and that when it hits this side the wheels roll backwards. Is that what you meant?



C4: I have seen it, how the wheels inside, when they hit into the wheels turn backwards and it moves backward. Because that part is higher, they [the wheels] roll forward.

T: Oh, so you saw that there are two wheels inside and that when it hits this side the wheels roll backwards. Is that what you meant?



T: Oh, so you saw that there are two wheels inside and that when it hits this side the wheels roll backwards. Is that what you meant?

C4: shakes head no

T: What did you mean?

C4: there are two wheels inside this piece of zipline. And it slides, slides, slides. Hits this side and then gets pushed backwards.

T: That's right. They also discovered that when it hits into it was pushed back. But why does this thing get pushed back?

C4: Because it has wheels so it can be pushed backwards and forwards.



T: Oh, so you think it is connected to the wheels inside. Anything else? Let's see what Sweetie has to say.

C5: I think that there is a spring inside there.





# Risk or Hazard?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jkij9dJfcw>



# Woodland Forest School – U.K.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-9ADLZv7jms>

# Benefits of Risky Play

Awareness of the capabilities and limits of their own bodies

Balance and coordination

Overcoming challenging situations is an essential part of living a meaningful and satisfying life

Understanding consequence to action

Perseverance and resilience

Curiosity and wonder

Opportunity to develop the skills associated with managing and making informed decisions about risk from a young age

Problem solving

Self-confidence and independence

Navigating their way socially and emotionally in group situations

## What is a risk?

A risk is a challenge that a child can recognize and **chooses** to take on while determining their own limits. By definition, risks are different for every person.

## What is a hazard?

A hazard is a danger in the environment that a child is **unaware** of, i.e., it is beyond their capacity to recognize, and might cause injury.

### Potential Risks in outdoor play

- Jumping off of logs
- A game with new/different rules
- Rolling down a hill
- Wading in the brook
- Playing with sticks
- Rough and tumble play

### Potential Hazards in outdoor play

- Sharp object, e.g. broken glass
- Sick or injured animal
- Loose dog
- Tick bites
- Extreme weather (sunburn, frostbite, etc.)

# Discussion: Risk v. hazard

- In the examples we just saw, where did you see children taking risks? Did you see anything you could consider a hazard?
- If you imagine yourself as a teacher in one of these play contexts (adult-structured outdoor play environment like Anji, or forest environment) where do you feel comfortable? What makes you uncomfortable? Where would you like to push yourself to grow as a teacher?

In what ways  
can the  
learning  
environment  
(indoor or  
outdoor)  
support the  
PoP playful  
learning  
practices?

**Empower learners to lead their own  
learning**

**Build a culture of collaborative learning**

**Promote experimentation and risk-  
taking**

**Encourage imaginative thinking**

**Welcome all emotions generated  
through play**

# Looking Playfully at Documentation Protocol

**Listening:** The presenting teacher names their question and gives context about the documentation they are sharing (2 min)

**Looking:** Look carefully at the documentation for a few minutes (2-3 min)

**Clarifying:** Presenter answers short, fact-based questions from the group (2 min)

**Noticing and Wondering:** a round of “I notice” (just saying what you see/hear in the documentation without judgement), and then “I wonder” statements. The presenter listens and is silent (4 min)

**Pretending:** Take on roles, act out a scenario from the documentation (2-3 min)

**Noticing/Wondering again:** Did the playing help you notice anything new? (2 min)

**Inspiring:** Repeat the presenter’s question. What could the presenter try as next steps in their teaching? Or share ideas of what to document next. (5 min)

**Closing:** The presenter has the last word to share their take-aways/questions. (2 min)