

Chapter 4

Teaching and Learning Strategies for Motor Games and Play in Outdoor Environments: A Didactic Approach to Motor Learning

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ABSTRACT

Several studies have shown the value of outdoor environments for children's development in different ways: developing motor skills, more harmonious and imaginative play, improving quality of playing and perception of landscapes. This chapter will introduce how different outdoor environments affect children's play activities and motor development. Children interpret landscapes as functions to play and they operationalize the affordances as an awareness of the environments and their functional meaning into action. The methodological approach to outdoor motor play will be based on a Dynamic Systems Approach, the Theory of Affordances, and the Typology of Place. These approaches will introduce the outdoor environment as a context for learning, affording children different challenges to be explored through problem solving and experiential learning. Stimulating fundamental motor skills in early years will be the basic approach using theories that support these perspectives.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we focus on outdoor landscapes that promote motor learning in young children and how the children can learn motor skills in a natural way where the learning process takes place in the context of outdoor environments. The physical environment refers to objects and structures that constitute landscapes as learning arenas where the physical environment should be stimulating, challenging, explorative and

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-9621-0.ch004

diverse and focus on open-ended and problem-solving tasks. Examples and studies will illustrate several theoretical views on motor learning and how the interaction between the individual and the environment can be understood as the interaction between person and environment and the interaction between perception and action that will promote motor learning in young children (Gibson 1979, Newell 1986).

Young children comprise a special group within motor development through learning motor skills. Because they have rapidly changing body characteristics, they are still in the process of establishing the full repertoire of fundamental motor skills. At the same time, children have an enormous potential to acquire new skills (Gallahue & Ozmun 2002). This places both more demands and more responsibilities in the hands of physical educators.

Children perceive environments as functions: functions to move, functions to build, functions to hide, to play etc. Outdoor environments afford such challenges to children in different ways, and the more diverse, the more challenging. Titman (1994) described very clearly the children's preferences for outdoor play environments: colours in nature, trees, woodland, shifting topography, meadows, shaded areas, places for climbing and construction, and challenging places for exploring and experience.

The pedagogical and didactic approaches to motor learning will be exemplified through analyses and description of environmental qualities that promote motor play and the particular motor competences that will be stimulated by outdoor environmentally based games and motor skill acquisition attained in learning through landscapes and seasonal qualities. A Dynamic System Approach based on Newell's theory (1986) on the contextual relations between person and environment is fundamental for understanding that learning always occur in the context with the environment. This is also supported and explained through studies with small children by Thelen & Smith (1994). The functional context of person – environment relations is also based on Gibson's theory of Affordances (1979, 1986) and is fundamental for understanding the interaction between child and the environment as children's play is always situated and embedded in the possibilities offered by the environment . The "Sense of Place" by Manion & Lynch (2015) support the understanding of the vital role of place and landscapes for motor learning skills. Landscapes support motor games, allow social, emotional, cognitive development and the acquisition of motor skills in children such as knowledge and mastery of their own body, postural control, manipulations, basic movements, coordination, balance and agility etc. Cases will be described and analysed according to appropriate theory. The probability of learning effects from outdoor landscapes will be analysed and discussed in relation to literature.

This chapter will focus on how to organise and adapt the teaching process so that children can learn motor skills in a natural way, rather than through traditional instructional teaching. The learning process takes place in the context with outdoor environments that have significance for motor learning and will promote motor skill development in children. The outdoor environments refer to objects and structures that constitute landscapes as learning arenas for motor skills acquisition. The physical environment should be stimulating, challenging, explorative and diverse and focus on open-ended and problem-solving tasks.

Objectives for the chapter:

- Describe how outdoor environments may afford physical activity and promote motor development in young children
- Describe the concept of affordances: Perceiving environmental objects is to perceive what they afford.
- Demonstrate that motor abilities are task specific and that they need to be trained in the context of the environment.

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