



Playing Outdoors - Risks and Benefits

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Harry Harbottle

- **More than 25 years representing consumer interests on EU child safety committees**
- **Co-author, European playground safety standard and European guidebook on subject**
- **Former Head of Consumer Protection/Public Health/Regeneration, Leicester, UK**
- **Currently working around Europe with Richter Spielgeraete**
- **Partner, CATE Consultancy**
- **MD Nature Play (Ireland)/Timberplay Scotland**

Our hopes

- Children accepted as beings
- Full contact with nature
- Develop a sense of place
- Increased independent mobility

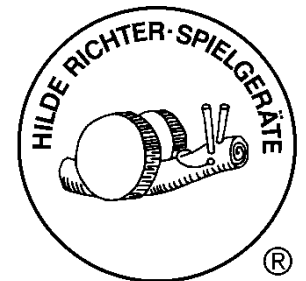
Our fears

- Children designed out of spaces
- Fear of litigation
- Over-protection of children
- Creativity loses out to safety
- Flight from judgement
- Benefits of activities not given equal value

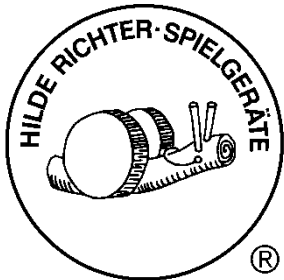
Not just about children – about humanity



- Concerns everybody
- Good for children is good for mankind
- Link children to their world



From 2 to 92





Definition of Play

“Behaviour which is: freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated and performed for no external goal or reward. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons.”

Welsh Assembly Government

Essential ingredients for design



- Anywhere
- Nature
- Risk/challenge









Benefits of Natural Surroundings

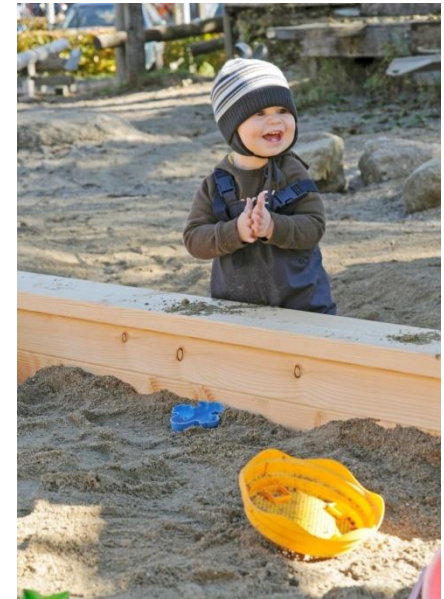


- “outdoor natural space provides additional opportunities for critical thinking, creative enquiry and problem solving; fundamental life skills”
Petty et al 2009
- *RSPB “Every Child Outdoors”*

Children and the Elements



Earth





Grass has makes a comeback!

- **Grass is a low cost, readily available and environmentally friendly surface that is like by children... it can.. enhance opportunities for incidental and unstructured play.**
- **Grass can, on playgrounds with a low intensity of use, be successfully used below and around play equipment, removing the necessity to install specialist Impact Attenuating Surfaces.**
- **The suitability of grass has to be determined locally by risk assessment.**
- **The maximum fall height of the equipment is less than 1,5m.**

Children and the elements
Air







Children and the elements

Fire



Children and the elements

Water

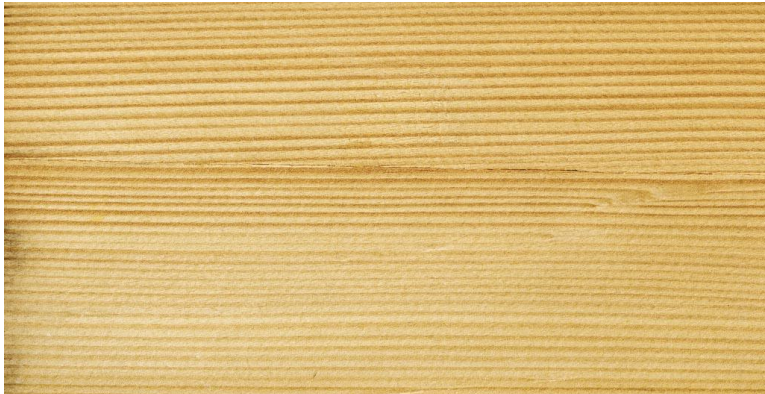






Wood – the fifth element

- Tactile
- Temp. Conductivity
- Sustainability
- Organic structure
- Comprehensive construction



“Obstacles and difficulties should not be eliminated from the play area but rather designed in such a way that they can be overcome thus allowing for new experiences.”

Gunter Beltzig, Designer





“All children need a place to play. They need space, informality, freedom to move around and make a noise, to express themselves, to experiment and investigate.

Lady Allen, Kidscape





The Alnwick Garden, Northumberland



Risk/Challenge Conflict/Balance

Between:

- **Children's need to experience risk, and**
- **Requirement to offer an acceptable level of safety**

What's yer chances?

- 1: 610 Burn/Scald at home**
- 1: 8,200 Pregnancy related death**
- 1: 16,800 Road Accident**
- 1: 14,000,000 Lottery Win**
- 1: 18,700,000 Lightning Strike**
- 1: 30,000,000 Fatality on Playground**



The real danger is:

- in relying on technical safety whereas behavioural safety is a bigger factor
- the qualitative loses out to the quantitative (benefits cannot easily be counted)
- the rational loses out to the emotional
- judgement loses out to measurement
- creativity loses out to “safety”.



„Kinder sind Grenzgänger“

Working to the limits – their own limits





The Policy

“Children are entitled to take part in physical activities and to play, including outdoors and have the opportunity to experience and judge and manage risk”
(Article 31)

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

**Managing Risk in Play
Provision:
Implementation Guide –
the concept of Risk Benefit
Analysis**

www.playengland.org resources



The Law

“...the question of what amounts to such care as in all the circumstances of the case is reasonable depends upon assessing, as is the case in common law negligence, not only that the likelihood that someone might be injured and the seriousness of the injury that may occur, but also the **social value of the activity** which gives rise to the risk and the cost of preventative measures. These factors have to be balanced against each other”.

House of Lords 2003

The Policy

Improving outcomes and children's quality of life through play

“While we must act to limit young people’s exposure to risks that they cannot control, giving children responsibility and allowing them to explore the world in a way that is appropriate to their age and development in a way that they can control is a key part of developing confidence. **There is a feeling that, in recent times, there has been too much focus on eliminating all risk to children rather than understanding risk. We must reverse this trend and equip young children with the skills to manage risk and make positive choices based on assessing the situation facing them”**

Early Years Framework

The European Standard

“Risk-taking is an essential feature of play provision..... Play provision should aim at managing the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children safe from serious harm.”

“In play provision exposure to some degree of risk may be of benefit because it satisfies a basic human need and gives children the chance to learn about risk and consequences in a controlled environment.”

“...and secondly to lessen serious consequences caused by the occasional mishap that inevitably still occur in children’s pursuit of expanding their level of competence, be it socially, intellectually or physically.”

The guidance

“Even when there is a risk of fatal or permanent disabling injury, this risk may sometimes be tolerable”

“A paddling pool, even if shallow, involves a low but inevitable risk of drowning but this is normally tolerable. The likelihood is typically extremely low, the hazard is readily apparent, children benefit through the benefit of water play and finally, further reduction or management of risk is not practicable **without taking away the benefits**”





Schule in Bewegung Fridthof Nansen School, Hannover

- Self confidence
- Awareness of own limitations
- Self protecting behaviour



A leap into the future



Help those responsible for a wide range of play provision to feel confident competent to offer the sort of play, adventurous and leisure and opportunities that so many of us believe in.

To offer beneficial risk-taking opportunities across a range of settings and situations.

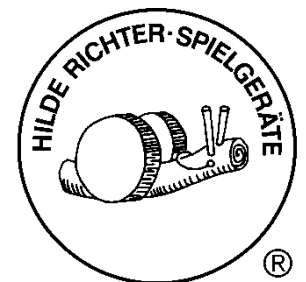
Use a risk *benefit* assessment as a “suitable and sufficient” risk assessment for organisational and statutory purposes.



“Successful” Play Spaces



- Play Value
- Safety
- Stability
- Environment Friendly
- Maintenance Friendly
- Play Value, play value, play value





“As much play value as possible, as much safety as necessary.” Julian Richter

