

## ENABLING ENVIRONMENTS OUTDOORS

is, insufficient 'free' space per child outdoors) experienced more aggression between children.

- Aggression between children increased when no manipulable material was provided outdoors.
- Centres with equipment purchased in the preceding six years had less space for 'non-equipment' play.
- Fixed play equipment (for example, a climbing structure) was unoccupied for 87 per cent of the time. Of the remaining 13 per cent of time, only three per cent was spent using the structure in the way the manufacturer had intended.
- Contact with living things increased developmental opportunities for children.
- There was no discernible relationship between the themes created by manufacturers or designers and children's own imaginative play.
- The materials the play space was made from influenced the 'soundscape', which in turn affected stress levels in children.
- Children want more soft spaces, indoors and outdoors.

### WHAT ARE THE 7CS?

The 7Cs research is not intended as a 'tick list' for designers or practitioners. The Cs are all interconnected, with the character of a space significantly influenced by the other six Cs.

**Character:** the atmosphere, or 'feel' of the space; character is influenced by each of the following six Cs.

**Context:** how the immediate locality, external factors such as microclimate and the relationship between the building and the garden spaces affect the quality of the space.

**Connectivity:** the 'accessibility' of the space – how easily children are able to move around it, see through it and into it and how they understand the area as a coherent setting for play.

**Change:** the landscape should include open and private spaces, differently sized areas and places of varying levels and heights. The space should look different each day, each season, each year.

**Chance:** the opportunity for spontaneity and manipulation. Children should be able to affect their play space with open-ended resources and a landscape that lends itself to adaptation.

**The materials of the play space influence the 'soundscape' (below); Grandpont in Oxford is designed to enable exploratory play (right)**

**Clarity:** the 'legibility' of the space, which includes the scale of any fixed features and the perceptions children retain of 'their' space. Entrances and exits should be clear and the space should allow for free movement.

**Challenge:** this refers not just to physical challenges, but also to the intellectual and emotional risks the space enables children to take.

### FACTORS AFFECTING QUALITY

The study involved 16 full daycare centres in Vancouver, chosen to represent a distinct cross-section of settings – urban, suburban and semi-rural; new, refurbished and adapted – and to represent the rich diversity of cultural and socio-economic groups resident in the greater Vancouver area.



The research comprised observations, photographic surveys, focused interviews and reflection on policies and standards that shape outdoor spaces for young children. The outcomes of other studies that documented the qualities of outdoor play spaces for young children were also included.

The research team identified five factors that influence the quality of outdoor play. They examined the prevalence of these in the 16 study settings and drew conclusions about the effect they had on children's well-being. The factors were as follows.

- The size of the space, and where children played within this space. It became clear that while the amount of space 'allocated' to each