

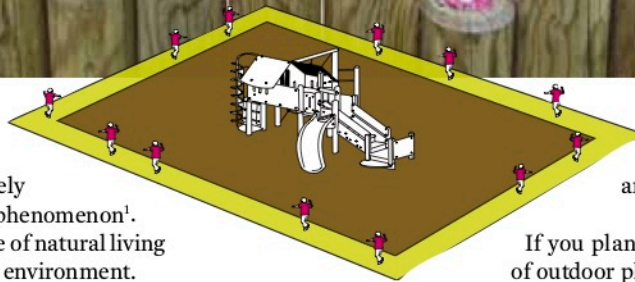


child had remained constant over the past 30 years, the quantity of space allocated to fixed play equipment (and its inevitable safer surfacing) had increased, meaning less 'free' space for children to engage in gross motor play. In tandem with this development, it became apparent that lack of gross motor play was contributing to worryingly high levels of childhood obesity.

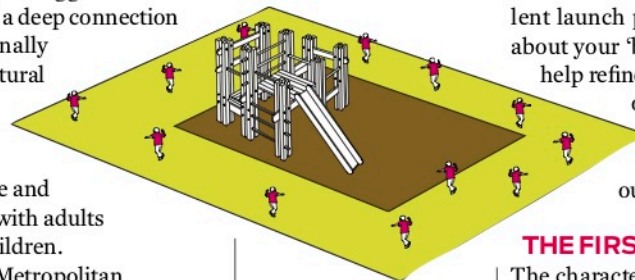
- The relationship between types of play and the nature of the space the play was occurring in. *Nursery World* readers will be familiar with the taxonomy of play, but the 7Cs research also looked at the duration of play in different environments and noted where the play was child-initiated, adult-led or a combination of both.
- Children's and adults' perceptions of the space, both during the study period and the longer-term impressions gained by users over the lifetime of their connection with the setting. Research by educational charity Learning through Landscapes demonstrated that the quality of the environment had a direct impact on children's self-esteem and motivation

to learn and this is now a widely understood phenomenon<sup>1</sup>.

- The presence of natural living things in the environment. Again, research suggests that children feel a deep connection with the eternally changing natural world and are keen to share what they see and understand with adults and other children. At Swansea Metropolitan University, Jane Waters found that 'natural landscapes afforded engagement with the environment and with the practitioners' and that 'children are drawn to particular features of the landscapes and are willing and eager to share their interests with staff and other children'<sup>2</sup>. 7Cs backed up this premise.
- The availability and quantity of materials children can control and manipulate, such as sand, water, gravel and mud. The desire to experiment and explore is innate in young children and the most successful spaces offered



opportunities to dig, transport, spill, throw and collect.



If you plan to examine the quality of outdoor play at your setting, these five factors would make an excellent launch point. Detail and clarity about your 'baseline' conditions will help refine your improvement priorities. This in turn will justify the time and money spent on the outdoor space project.

**Safety areas around equipment have increased since the 1980s (top diagram shows regulations now, with 1980s below)**

**Does your garden reflect the ethos and approach of your setting?**

### THE FIRST 'C': CHARACTER

The character of the space describes its 'overall feel' and is very much a subjective judgement. The 7Cs team identified four distinct architectural types that also strongly influence the atmosphere outdoors.

- Modern – the design reflects the 'infrastructure and mechanisms of the landscape and building'.
- Organic – the space contains materials children can manipulate and is characterised by changing landscape features.
- Modular – whereby equipment dominates the space, leaving limited 'free' space for play.
- Re-use – where the space is adapted from some other