

Creating Enabling Places for Children's Exploration of the Natural World

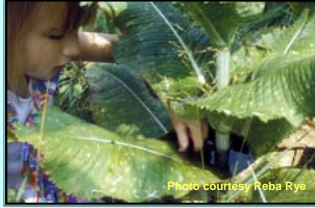


Photo courtesy Reba Rye

Louise Chawla
 "Playgrounds: Laboratories for Outdoor Learning"
 ACM Annual Conference, April 24, 2008

Safe natural areas provide ideal settings for the development of children's environmental knowledge and competence

- Autonomous movement
- Encounters with responsive affordances
- Perceptible self-produced effects
- Graduated challenges

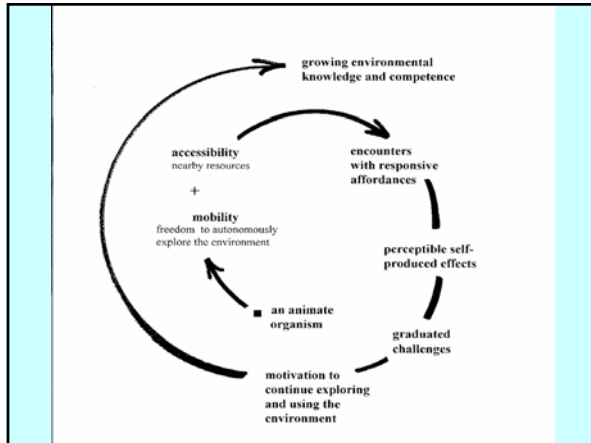


Photo © Chicago Zoological Society

autonomous movement – which can be especially expansive and free in the outdoors



encounters with responsive affordances

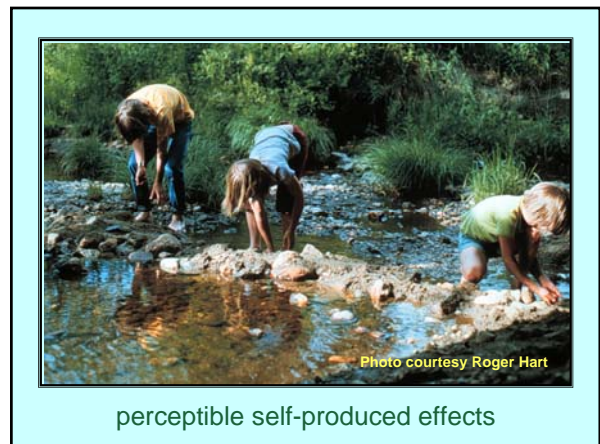
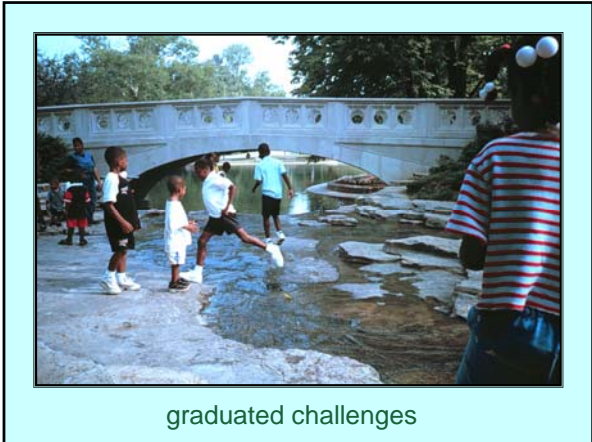


Photo courtesy Roger Hart

perceptible self-produced effects



graduated challenges



Photo © Chicago Zoological Society



Stamill Family Play Zoo, Brookfield Zoo
Photo © Chicago Zoological Society

In these settings, children are discovering a world with which they have a bond as ancient as the chemistry in their cells, from which human existence evolved and on which it continues to depend.

Today's children are already the second generation likely to be estranged from free play in nature. Therefore the role of "play partners" is critical to communicate to parents the value of nature play and exploration.



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The Universe is revealed to me not as a space,
imposing a massive presence to which I can
only adapt, but as a scope, a domain which
takes shape as I act upon it.

Paolo Freire
Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 1972, p. 65