



Examining Wild Play in ECE

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Agenda

- Explore concepts
- New research
- Previous research
- Research -practice connections

General ideas about play

Play is an active process without an end product.

Play is an integrating mechanism that combines everything the child has been experiencing, learning, knowing, and understanding. Play is rooted in real experiences, processes, and explorations.

Adapted from Bruce, T. (2020). *Educating young children: A lifetime journey into a Froebelian approach. The selected works of Tina Bruce.* Routledge.





Free--flow play



wallowing in ideas,
feelings &
relationships



application of
developed
competence, mastery
and control



Wild Play

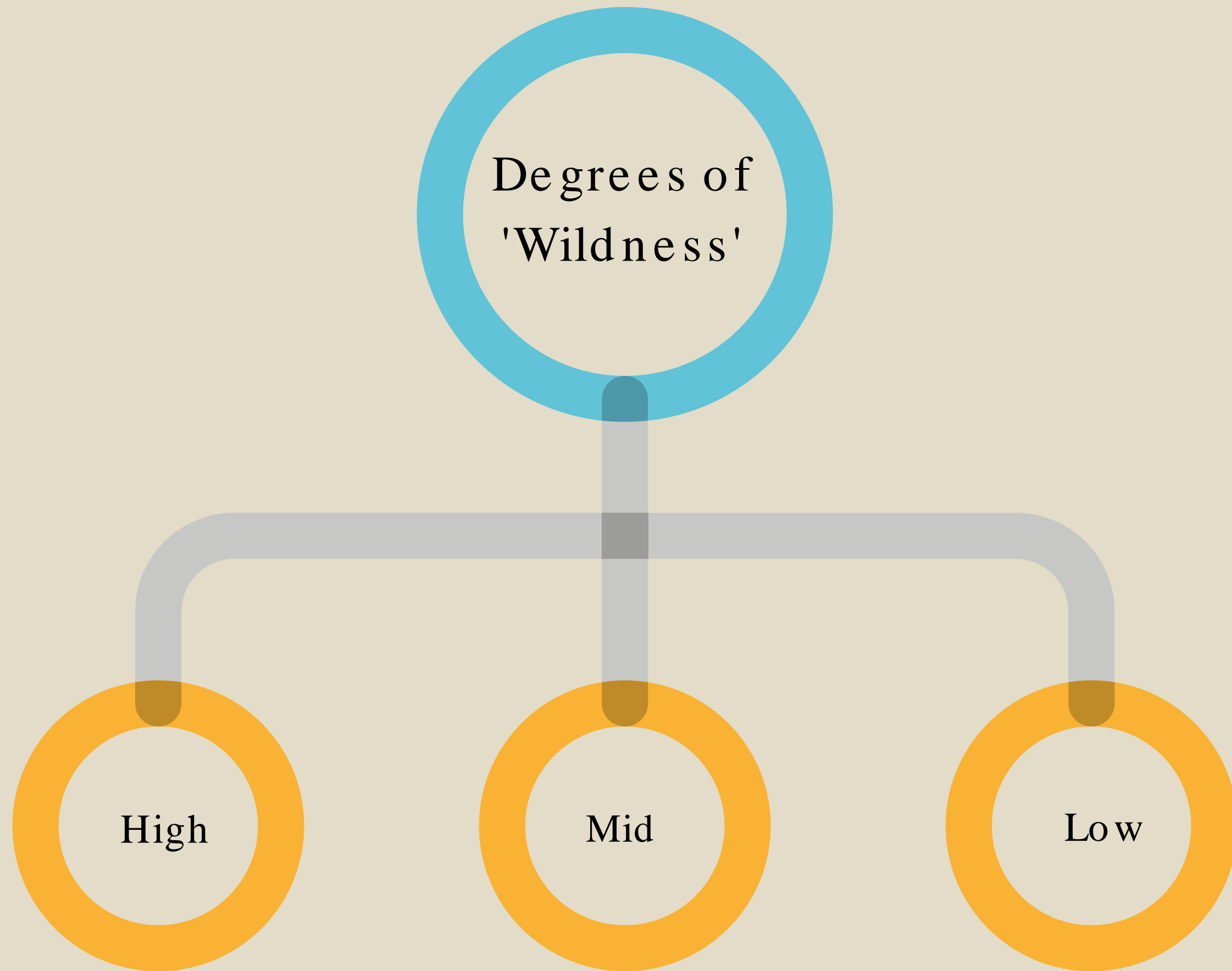
Agency of nature within play
Nature as co-player
Wildness versus control
Complexity, the unknown, and spontaneity

Why use the term wild
play/spaces?





Wild from
the child's
perspective



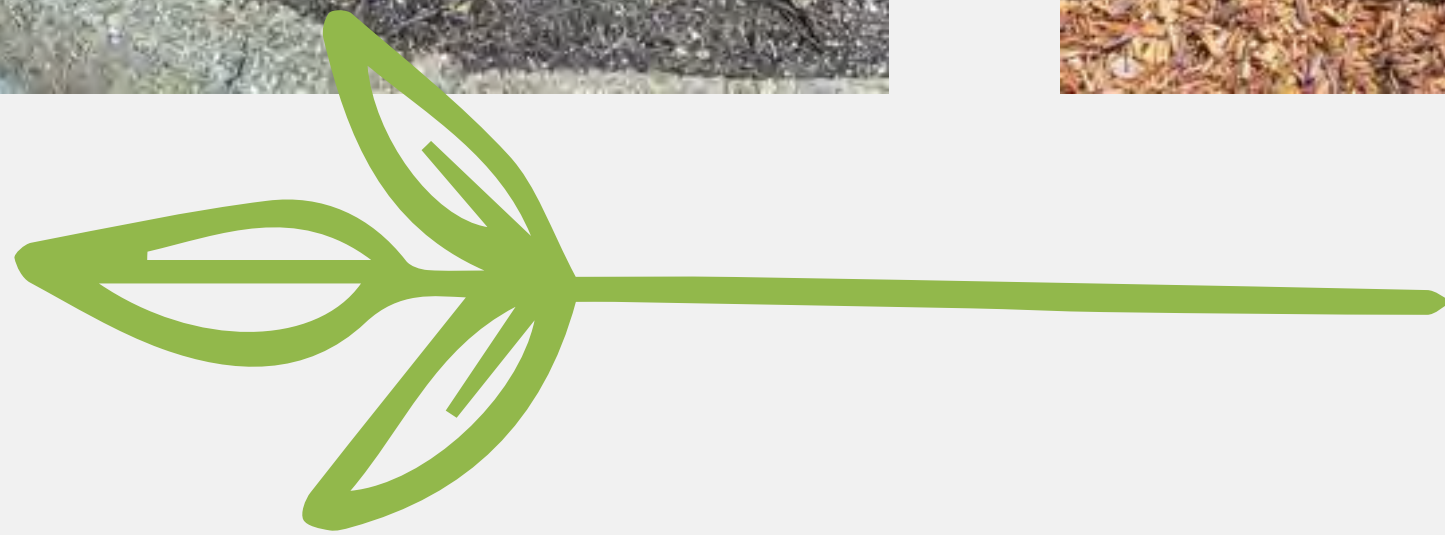
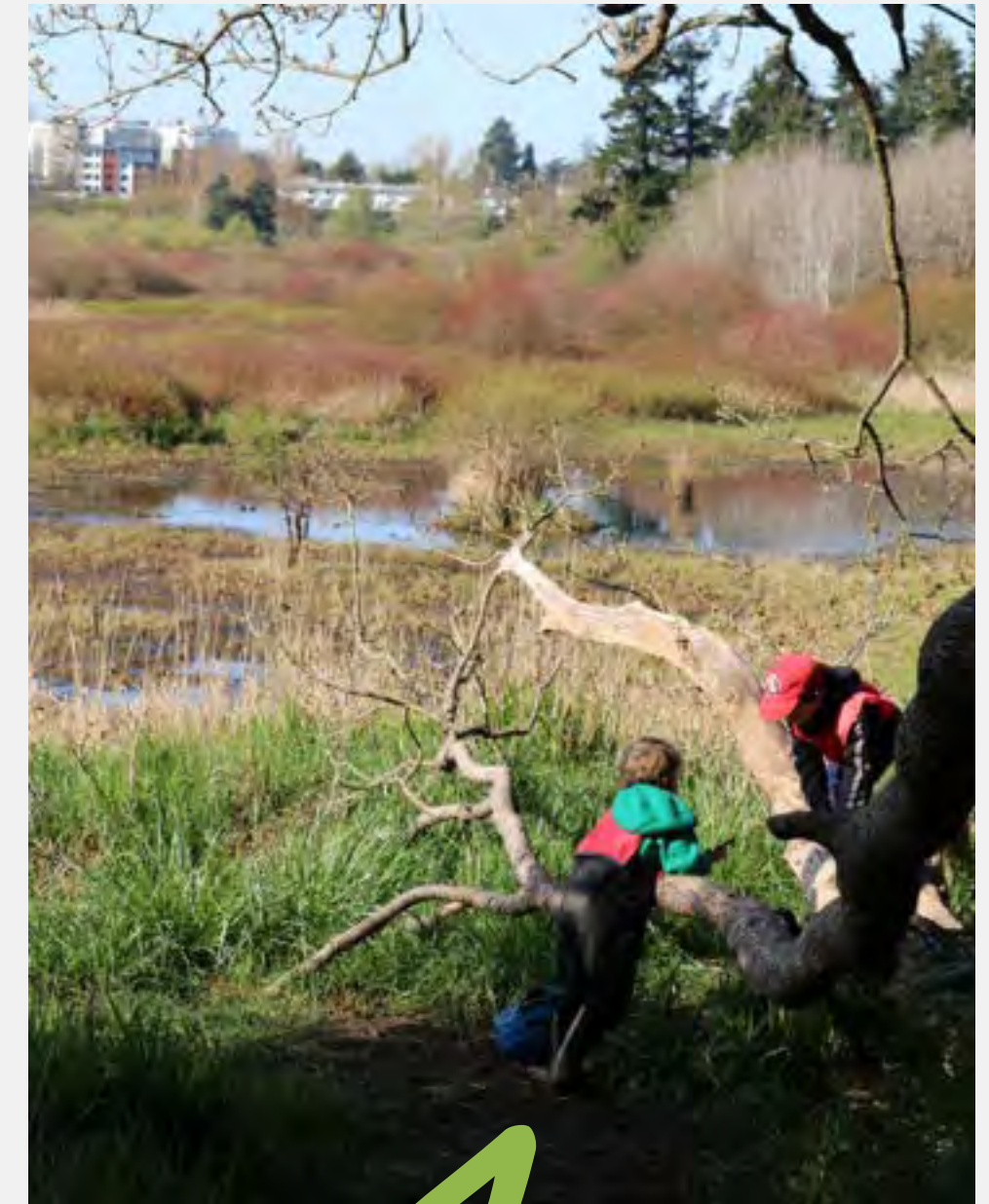
High=managed



Mid=mixed



Low=natural ecosystems





Encourages
rethinking the **control**
or **management** of
spaces



Ungroomed wild spaces

Hold mysteries for children
Discovery potential
Creativity & inventive thinking
Magical thinking

Preschool Children Explore the Forest— The Power of Wild Spaces in Childhood

By Anna Golded

Child-Related Benefits of Outdoor Nature Play



Wealth of mental and physical benefits (Bratman et al., 2019; Frumkin et al., 2017).

For children in particular, nature supports cognitive, social, and physical development (Chawla, 2015; Fyfe-Johnson et al., 2021; Kahn & Kellert, 2002; Kuo et al., 2019).

Wild Play Benefits



Quality of interactions deepen when children have access to
'wild' nature .

Weiss, T., Kahn, P. H., & Lam, L.-W. (2023). Children's interactions with relatively wild nature associated with more relational behavior: A model of child -nature interaction in a forest preschool. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 86, 101941 –. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2022.101941>

My Research

Wild Contexts & Wild Play

Qualitative & Post Qualitative Paradigms

- Focused on the child's experiences
- Educators' perceptions & shifts in pedagogies
- The role of nature



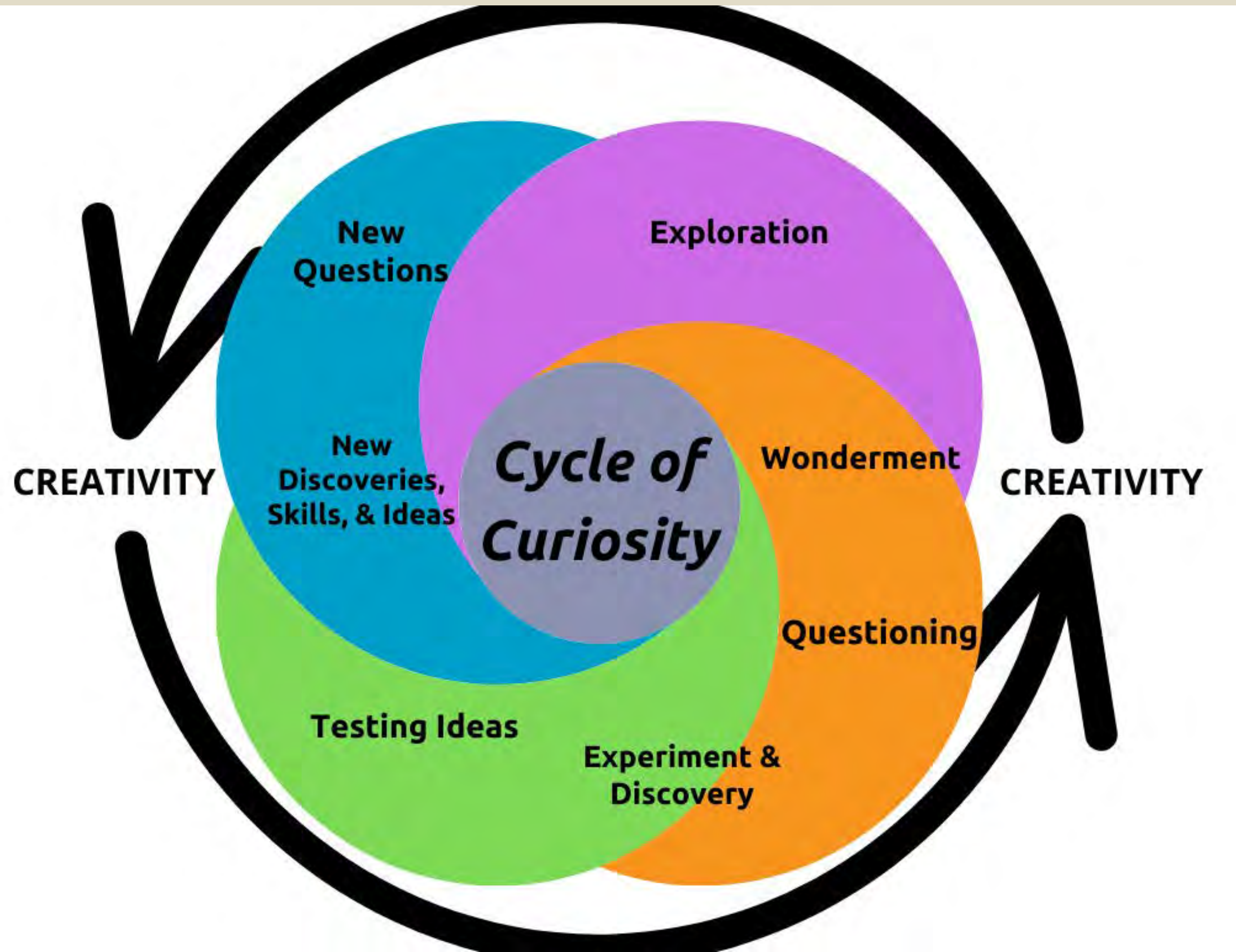
Variety of Methods



What have I learned?

Holistic
benefits





Learning
Benefits

The Role of Nature Entanglements



4 Big Themes

uniqueness

affinity



Pace

Constraints
removed



Slow Pedagogies

Countering fast -paced lives &
'hurried childhoods'

Clark, A., (2023). Slow knowledge and the unhurried child-time for slow pedagogies in early childhood education. Routledge.



Slow Pedagogies

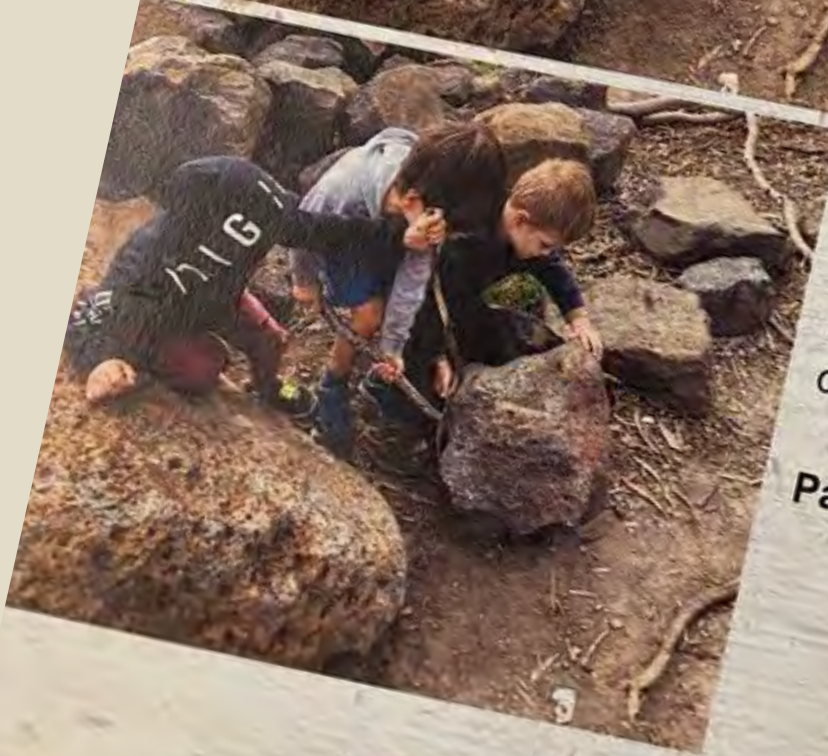
A Different Kind of Philosophy

A focus on being-with and relational attunement



Slow Pedagogies in Wild Spaces

Levering rocks 24.3.22
Leo, Max and Ethan spent a long time working with the rocks trying to move them. Ethan began by using his hands to try and pull the rock but couldn't do it. Shan suggested he come behind the rock and use his muscles to push it but it didn't work. Leo suggested using a stick to help Ethan lever the rock which worked. They continued to work together problem solving and communicating and managed to roll the rocks over but were disappointed to find that some had no slaters underneath!



Curriculum Framework/Philosophy Links
All-weather, indoor/outdoor authentic play programs provide nurturing, stimulating, responsive and adventurous environments for learning. (Philosophy)
Leo, Max, and Ethan are exploring physics and engineering concepts through play (Learning) and communicating mathematical theories. (Communication)
They are also learning to manipulate equipment and manage tools with increasing competence and skill. (Wellbeing)

Future Learning - Opportunities to investigate scientific concepts through play
Parent/Child Voice

Research-Practice Connections

- What is possible when educators become familiar with a wild space over repeated visits?
- How might we make room for educators to be less hurried and more engaged with wild spaces?
- What experiences might be possible if we 'let go' or 'go off track'?



A close-up photograph of a person's hands in a blue jacket using a red-handled knife to carve a wooden stick. The stick is held horizontally, and the knife is being used to shape its end. The background is dark and out of focus, showing some wood shavings on a surface. The text is overlaid in white, serif font.

YOU WERE WILD
ONCE.

DON'T LET THEM
TAME YOU.

-ISADORA DUNCAN

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Thank you...

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