


2022-2023 OMEP ESD AWARD PROPOSAL FORM

Title of the Project	Play for the Planet: Supporting Creativity and Sustainability in Early Childhood Education	
Name of project leader	Associate Professor Özge Metin ASLAN	
Email address	metinozge@gmail.com	
School or institution	Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat University/TURKEY	
Names of others on the project team (if any)	Esen Hacıömer, Preschool Teacher, Cikcilli Mehmet Emine Öncü Preschool	
National OMEP committee	Prof. Dr. Serap Çimen Erdoğan/TURKEY	
Signature of the National OMEP Committee president		
Project participants	Participants	Number
	Children (include age)	Approx.850 (total all years: 2021,2022,2023)
	Teachers	8
	Families	Approx.300
	Teacher education students	40
	Others	8 (graduate student volunteers)

ABSTRACT, including project aims and outcomes (max. 250 words)

This project aims to support young children's creativity, imagination, and problem-solving skills by letting them create their own free play with loose materials. It also introduces them to the concept of sustainable development through play. It also promote quality education by providing Playworker Training to pre services preschool teachers and introducing children to the concept of sustainable development through play. The project has another three objectives: 1) to increase the awareness of pre-service preschool teachers towards free play and to help them create a safe and stimulating environment for children to explore, experiment, and engage in play-based activities that promote creativity, socialization and facilitate their play. 2) to support families to enhance their children's creativity and self-confidence and to educate them about sustainability; and 3) to raise awareness of free play with loose parts materials among families and children. The project follows the 7Rs principle: respect, reflect, rethink, reuse, reduce, recycle, redistribute. It has been running in three phases since 2021 and has reached 8 university graduates, 40 pre-service preschool teachers, approximately 650 preschool children and 300 families.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT (max. 4 pages). You may attach photos as an appendix. However, please note that photos should be considered supplemental to the written narrative about your project.

The First Phase of the Project / 2021

This project first started in June 2021 with the facilitation of Alanya Municipality and Alanya District Governorate, right after the pandemic. 8 university graduate volunteers participated in the first team. In the last week of June, the volunteers were given playwork training in the last week of June for five days/15 hours/in the early childhood period, play pedagogy, playwork practices, adventure playgrounds, loose parts, and first aid training. This training focuses on facilitating and guiding children's play and also includes applied processes in terms of the usability of loose parts.



Practical Playwork Training for University Graduate Volunteer Students

After the training, practices were started in Alanya near a traditional playground where families and children often come. Loose parts were kept in a warehouse/booth next to a traditional playground. Materials were brought through the playworkers so that the children could start their play. Children from different age groups played with loose parts. These materials were generally; large pipes, tires, pieces of old fabric, cardboard boxes, cardboard pipes, balls, safes, keyboards, mice, steering wheels, kitchen utensils, and large wooden blocks. These materials were collected from the recycling facilities of Alanya Municipality.



Loose Parts Materials

The project, which started on 3-4 July 2021 for the first time, continued uninterruptedly until 18 July 2021, but was interrupted due to the re-emergence of the COVID 19 pandemic in Alanya. After the big forest fire that affected Alanya Manavgat on August 12, 2021, it started again for the children affected by the big forest fire and turned into a mobile sustainable free play area. Volunteers came together with children in the villages affected by the big forest fire. Photos from 2021 are presented below. You can find more on the link at the end.



The Second Phase of the Project / 2022

With the return of universities to face-to-face education, the project started again on October 9, 2022, and playworker training was started for 40 preschool teacher candidates. After about 6 weeks/12 hours of training, the playworkers were the second team of the project. The project continued in October 2021, November 2021, April 2021, and May 2022. In May 2022, our project also received an invitation from Alanya Can Preschool. We offered the children attending this school the opportunity to play with loose party materials. Photos from 2022 are presented below. You can find more on the link at the end.



The Third Phase of the Project / 2023

Esen Hacıömer, who is a preschool teacher and the other member of the project, started the third phase of the project in November 2022 at Cıkıllı Mehmet Emine Öncü Preschool. This phase, different from the other two phases, made it more possible to see the effect of loose part play on the sustainability and play behaviors of children. The children in Esen's class played the loose parts outside for 40 minutes, two days a week. Before the children played with loose part materials, they talked about what play was and expressed their opinions. At this stage of the project, the teacher evaluated the process by keeping a reflective diary. Photos of 2023 are presented below. You can find more on the link at the end.



Why this project?

The project was based on the theoretical framework of playwork (Hughes, 2001) and the pedagogy of loose parts (Nicholson, 1971), which emphasize the importance of child-led play and exploration with diverse and open-ended materials. The project follows the 7Rs principle: respect, reflect, rethink, reuse, reduce, recycle, redistribute.

1. **To promote sustainable practices:** One reason why we might do this project is to promote sustainable practices among children. By introducing them to the concept of sustainable development at an early age and providing them with opportunities to engage in sustainable play, the project aims to instill in them a sense of responsibility towards the environment.
2. **To provide with loose parts materials and encouraged to use their imagination** to create their own free play and activities. By engaging in free play, children are able to develop their creativity, problem-solving skills, social skills,

and emotional regulation. In addition, free play is an effective way to promote sustainable practices as it encourages children to use their imagination to repurpose and reuse materials in new and creative ways.

3. **To foster creativity:** Another reason why we might do this project is to foster creativity in children. The project provides children with the opportunity to express themselves, develop their imagination, and problem-solving. Creativity was a central focus of this project because it is a valuable skill for children to develop. Through creative play, children are able to express themselves, problem-solve, and develop their imagination. In addition, creativity is an important aspect of sustainable development, as it encourages innovation and new ways of thinking. By using loose parts materials, the children were encouraged to think outside the box and come up with unique solutions to create their play. The Playworker training provided to the preservices preschool teachers also emphasized the importance of fostering creativity in children.
4. **To provide Playworker training during preschool teacher education:** The project also provides Playworker training to preservices preschool teachers, which can be valuable for those interested in pursuing a career in early childhood education. Playworker training emphasizes the importance of fostering creativity, facilitating and guiding free play, and environmental awareness in children through play. Playworkers guide children to help them have fun, use their creativity and imagination, increase their self-confidence and interact with each other. In addition, playworkers take precautions to ensure that children are safe during play and ensure that they have easy access to the materials in the play environment. Trained playworkers came together with children of different age groups, especially pre-school children, and became guides as the children created their own playgrounds with loose parts. Moreover, playworkers recognize their own impact on the play space and also the impact of children and young people's play on the playworker. Playworkers choose an intervention style that enables children and young people to extend their play.
5. **To contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** The project incorporates SDGs goals, which are a set of global goals established by the United Nations to promote sustainable practices and reduce inequality worldwide. By contributing to these goals, the project aims to make a positive impact on the world.

How about relation with SDGs?

Goal 4: Quality Education - The project promotes quality education by providing Playworker training to prospective preschool teachers and introducing children to the concept of sustainable development through play.

Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production - The project encourages responsible consumption and production by using loose parts materials in creating play, which can be reused and repurposed.

Goal 13: Climate Action - The project fosters climate action by promoting sustainable practices and introducing children to the concept of sustainability at an early age.

What is new about this project?

This project represents a significant milestone in Turkey's early childhood education, as it is the country's first loose part and sustainable play initiative, facilitated by a dedicated team of volunteer pre-school teacher candidates. The initiative is ingeniously adapted to operate as a mobile facility, providing children with a safe and nurturing environment to unwind and recuperate from traumatic events such as forest fires. The initiative aims to expand to include the creation of mobile playgrounds for kindergartens throughout Alanya, providing even more opportunities for children to engage in free creative, sustainable play.

What is the results of the project?

The Results of First Phase of the Project / 2021

In order to reveal the indirect results of the project, families were asked about their experiences and feelings when the children were playing with loose part materials in 2021. The content analysis of the answers given, the categories Importance of Free Play (f:7), Positive Feelings (f: 14), Unique Activity (f:7); Sustainability and Recycle (f: 19); Against to Technology (f: 2); Imagination and Creativity (f: 29) formed and the answers of some participants are given below.

"I saw that there were materials open to imagination, I thought it was an area where children could play freely. I thought it supported my child's creativity my child and my child was very happy even without buying a toy..(Age, 45, Father). "I thought of it as an activity that supports children's imagination with leftover materials. I thought that imagination, sharing, supports physical, cognitive and mental development. (Age: 35, Mother)" "I thought that it was an environment where my child could play freely, and that natural, creative play could also bring joy to children." (Age: 40, Mother).

The Results of Second Phase of the Project / 2022

In the first two stages of the project, both 8 university graduate students (first phase) and 40 pre-school teacher candidates (second phase) who were involved in the project voluntarily were asked about their experiences after the practices with children and how this process would contribute when they started their own professional teaching. The project has also helped teacher candidates to become more aware of the importance of sustainable practices in early childhood education and to develop skills in designing and implementing sustainable play activities with children. According to the results, 5 different categories have been found regarding the contribution of playwork training to preschool teachers' professional development

- To ensure the contribution of the playworker training in preschool teachers' professional development
- To increase awareness of free play in child development by doing play practices
- To guide in the selection of sustainable play materials
- To guide alternative and sustainable play area design
- To guide in finding solutions to problems in the play

The Results of Third Phase of the Project / 2023

Esen Hacıömer, who is a project team member in the third phase of this project, has been continuing the project since November 2023. In the project, the teacher tried to record the process and reveal the changes in the children's play and creativity by taking reflective diary and observation notes. It has been determined that children's play emerge in The Play Cycle. The findings of the classroom teacher were found to be compatible with the play stages suggested by King and Newstead (2020). Accordingly, children tried to discover and recognize loose party materials, especially when they enter the field (Level 1). In the meantime, the teacher helped facilitate this phase by creating an inviting and accessible space that encourages exploration and experimentation. Secondly, children started to be interested in materials, equipment and activities in the play environment. During this time, it was observed that they tried different ideas and approaches and cooperated with other children (Level 2). The teacher, meanwhile, provided a range of resources that challenged and interested the children, facilitating their play while at the same time ensuring safety. Third, it has been determined that the play cycle focuses on imagination and creativity (Level 3). Here, children began to use their imaginations and create stories or scenarios around their play. They developed characters, roles and rules and tried different ways of interaction and communication. In the last stage of the cycle, it was seen that the children started to end their play and thought about their experiences. They reinforced what they had learned by discussing what they did, what worked, and what they could do differently next time. After the application at Level 3, the children drew pictures of what they played in their classrooms and evaluated their plans and processes.

What is next?

1. To continue the project in a public open play area again in April –May-June 2023
2. To organize new training for the playworkers who will take part in the ongoing project.
3. To create a toolkit and training program both primary and early childhood teachers in schools to create these play areas with loose part materials.
4. To evaluate the effectiveness of the loose parts materials and playworker training in fostering creativity and environmental awareness.
5. To share the project with different local municipalities and increase the number of areas support for the project among parents, educators, and other stakeholders.
6. Develop a comprehensive plan for the mobile play areas initiative, including funding, logistics, and partnerships with local organizations and businesses.
7. Conduct research on the impact of free play with loose materials on children's creativity, imagination, and problem-solving skills, as well as their socialization and self-confidence.
8. Collaborate with other organizations and initiatives that promote sustainable development and environmental awareness to raise awareness of the project and its goals.
9. Develop a training program for pre-service preschool teachers that focuses on free play with loose materials and sustainable development for their professional teacher education

Level 1



Level 2



Level 3-4



Level 1



Level 2



Level 3-4

You can find photos and videos of all stages this link: (Please know that we have a lot of photos and we share very few of them with you as we don't want it to be a huge drive file)

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/15XpmsnlhB-zKZITuxl4lrng6ZYTWigjV?usp=sharing>

References

Hughes, B. (2001). *Evolutionary Playwork and Reflective Analytic Practice* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203478653>

King, P., & Newstead, S. (2020). Re-defining the Play Cycle: An empirical study of playworkers' understanding of playwork theory. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 18(1), 99–111. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X19885991>

Nicholson, S. (1971). How not to cheat children – The theory of loose parts. *Landscape Architecture*, 62, 30-34.