



From Roots to New Horizons: Designing Outdoor Learning Across Generations

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Generational Shifts

Gen X (birth years 1965-1980)

- Independent, resourceful
- Grew up during the rise of personal computer and cable TV
- Experienced high divorce rates and latchkey childhoods
- Value work-life balance and self-reliance

Millennials (birth years 1981-1996)

- First gen to grow up with internet and smartphones
- Highly educated, tech-savvy, and socially conscious
- Faced challenges including great recession and student debt
- Value flexibility, purpose-driven work, and experiences over possessions

Gen Z (1997-2012)

- True digital natives: grew up with social media, streaming, and smartphones
- Diverse pragmatic and entrepreneurial
- Mental health awareness and social justice are important
- Value authenticity and individual expression

Gen Alpha (2013-2024)

- Children of millennials
- Immersed in AI, smart devices, and digital learning since birth
- Expected to be the most educated and tech-integrated gen
- Likely to have shorter attention span but greater multitasking ability



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Coming now...

Gen Beta (birth years 2025-2039)

*Expected traits

- Grow up with advanced AI, robotics, and climate adaptation tech
- Experience hyper-personalized customization
- Education, healthcare, and entertainment will be adaptive and data-driven

Gen

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- Mental health awareness and social justice are important
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Generational Shifts in Outdoor **Experiences**

Gen X (birth years 1965-1980)

- Nature as Escape
- DIY and Practical Activities
- Family-Oriented Recreation

Millennials (birth years 1981-1996)

- Experience-Driven
- Fitness and Wellness Focus
- Social and Digital

Gen Z (1997-2012)

- Tech-integrated Outdoors
- Short Bursts, High Engagement
- Eco-Conscious Motivation

Gen Alpha (2013-2024)

- Structured Outdoor Time
- Screen-Adjacent Play
- Parental Influence



Generational Shifts in Outdoor Learning

Gen X (birth years 1965-1980)

- Longer recess
- Unstructured play
- PE & sport Emphasis
- High species- and nature-knowledge

Millennials (birth years 1981-1996)

- Supervised structured activities
- Some technology connections
- Moderate species- and nature-knowledge

Gen Z (1997-2012)

- Play squeezed by standardized curriculum
- Need for balancing 'screen time with green time'
- Lowest species- and nature-knowledge

Gen Alpha (2013-2024)

- Tech-enhanced
- Safety & structure highly prioritized
- Link outdoors + wellness
- Lowest species- and nature-knowledge
- "Extinction of Experience, Plant blindness, & Environmental Generational Amnesia"

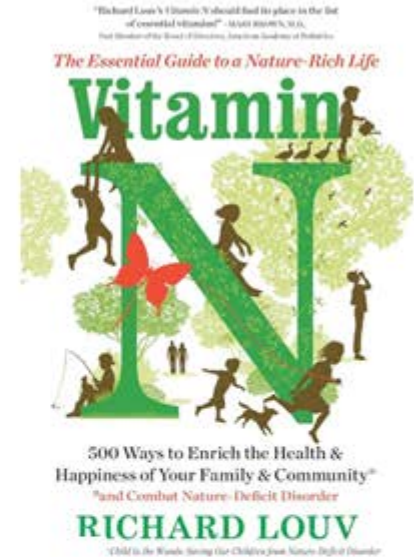
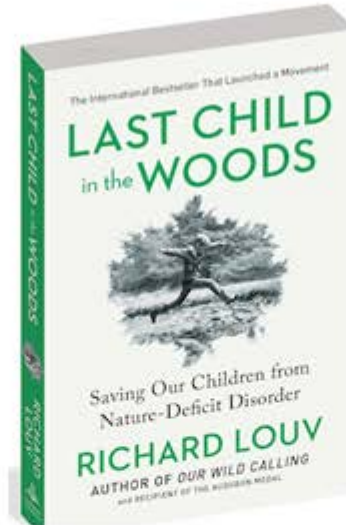


Design Drivers

- Technology
- Health & Well-being
- Inclusivity
- Collaboration
- Learning Applications
- Social & Community Connection



Research Insights



International Journal of
Environmental Research
and Public Health



Article

Enjoyed by Jack but Endured by Jill: An Exploratory Case Study Examining Differences in Adolescent Design Preferences and Perceived Impacts of a Secondary Schoolyard

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Abstract: The school grounds provide students opportunities for respite, relaxation and relief from daily stresses during breaks in the school day. However, it is unclear whether secondary schoolyard designs adequately support the diverse and evolving needs of adolescents, particularly at a time when they are experiencing rapid emotional and physical developmental change. To investigate this, quantitative methods were used to explore differences in perceptions of schoolyard attractiveness and restorative quality based on student gender and year level. A school-wide survey was administered to approximately 284 students in years 7 to 10 at a secondary school in Canberra, Australia. Results indicate significant declines in student perceptions of schoolyard attractiveness and restorative quality.



Citations & Valuable Resources

Children and Community Experiential Nature Activities

Louv, R. (2016). *The Essential Guide to a Nature-Rich Life Vitamin N 500 Ways to Enrich the Health & Happiness of Your Family & Community and combat Nature-Deficit Disorder*. Algonquin Books.

The Whole Child: Developing Mind, Body, and Spirit ASCD Publications Part of ASCD's Whole Child initiative, this book connects curriculum, well-being, and environments. Supports your point that outdoor learning is foundational, not 'extra'.

Children's Risky Play in Early Childhood Education and Care Edited by Ellen Beate Hansen Sandseter, Helen Little, and Shirley Wyver (2019) Evidence-based perspective on how outdoor risk and play support creativity, resilience, and social-emotional growth.

A New Language of School Design Association for Learning Environments (A4LE) (2023) Explores how biophilia, neuroarchitecture, and salutogenic design principles are shaping the future of learning environments.

Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder Richard Louv (2008) Seminal book on the importance of outdoor experiences in childhood development. Widely cited in both education and design circles.

Place-Based Education: Connecting Classrooms and Communities David Sobel (2004) Classic text on how outdoor and community-based experiences enrich curricula, deepen engagement, and build environmental stewardship.

Hyndman, B. [Brendon]. (n.d.). *Brendon Hyndman: Associate Dean (Academic) | Education Researcher | TEDx Speaker | Reimagining schools through evidence of play, place & purpose* [LinkedIn profile]. LinkedIn.
<https://www.linkedin.com/in/brendon-hyndman>