

Play outdoors when weather permits

Back in the 1940s, that was the mantra for teachers. It's what Joanne Godard Sorte, BA '74, MS '90, director of OSU's Child Development Center, found when, perplexed by rising obesity rates, she referred to the journal her mother kept during classes at the Oregon State College Nursery School. Jean Guyer Godard '42 kept notes in perfect cursive, detailing her lessons on childhood nutrition, activity, and development. "The morning snack was a glass of tomato juice and ½ teaspoon of cod liver oil," she chuckles, "and if it wasn't raining, we were outside."

Joanne found what she expected in Jean's journal – simple wisdom that we would do well to heed today. With the rising rates of children's obesity, sedentary lifestyles, and fast-food eating, Joanne and Inge Daeschel, the center's registered dietitian and certified specialist in pediatric nutrition, felt called to action.

"Where else but in a lab preschool like ours should such an issue be addressed?" Joanne recalls thinking in 2003 when she and Inge began planning a response to the problem.

"We turned the microscope on ourselves and examined the nutrition and physical activity of the 120 children who attend preschool at our center," explains Inge. "We interviewed our teachers about their nutrition lessons and reviewed daily classroom schedules. We did nutrition assessments, observed physical activity, and collected height and weight data. And we learned that more than 17 percent of our children score in the overweight category, and 15 percent more were at risk of being overweight." They compared the 1940 schedule in Jean's notes to a 2005 schedule to explore the time allotted for active play. Both set times for outdoor play, but



Joanne Sorte & Jean Guyer Godard

Jean's notes directed teachers in every time block to "play outdoors when weather permits." The 2005 schedule for part-time preschool offers a single 30-minute block for play outdoors.

In 2005, with support from the Northwest Health Foundation, Joanne and Inge created Health in Action: A Focus on Nutrition and Physical Activity in Early Childhood Programs. "Our goal is to provide information for directors, teachers, and parents about the nutrition and physical activity needs of children so changes can be made in programs and at home to reduce the causes of obesity," explains Joanne. The program is currently being used by Head Start programs statewide, and the Oregon Child Development Coalition has translated it into Spanish.



To learn more about OSU's Child Development Center, visit www.hhs.oregonstate.edu/hdfs/child-development-center.html



Health in Action: Five Simple Steps to Better Health

To improve children's nutrition

- 1 Serve skim or 1% milk and low-fat dairy products
- 2 Offer more fruits and vegetables
- 3 Eat breakfast
- 4 Serve basic whole foods rather than processed foods
- 5 Serve a variety of foods at consistent times

To improve children's physically active play

- Plan at least 60 minutes of active play every day
- Create safe places to play actively inside and out
- Spend more time outdoors every day
- Provide toys and equipment to encourage active play
- Be an active role model: eat and play together as a family