Creating a Nature-Based Culture in Your Program

You are here. On a blanket. Hanging out with peers, chatting about getting the little ones outdoors...

You are decidedly NOT in an office. Um, and your shoes are off.

Meet the Speaker

Bethe Almeras, MS
The Grass Stain Guru

• Education & Outreach Director, Head Start Body Start National Center for Physical Development and Outdoor Play
• Writer, speaker & play advocate
• Card-carrying nature geek and avid squirrel lover

“There is a garden in every childhood, an enchanted place where colors are brighter, the air softer, and the morning more fragrant than ever again.” ~ Elizabeth Lawrence

Come with me!!!

Note the hot 70's fashion.

Poll #1

Chime in: How did your “place memory” make you feel?
Why do you think so many more of our favorite places were outdoors than in?

5 Steps to Success

1. Creating a natural learning and outdoor play philosophy
2. Understanding the roles of the director & staff
3. Assessing the physical environment and outdoor play space (The Where)
4. Integrating nature/outdoors across the curriculum (The What)
5. Getting family buy-in

Before we get started, let’s frame this discussion a bit...
WHY is the outdoors so important to my education, health & happiness?

First generation of children whose life span is expected to be shorter than their parents...

Preschoolers watch 32 hours of TV a week.

Time spent with screens is associated with childhood obesity, sleep disturbances and attention span issues.

6 out of 10 overweight/obese preschoolers will be overweight or obese when they are 12 years old!

Free play & discretionary time has declined more than 9 hours a week over the last 25 years.

School-aged children spend 7.5 hours a day on electronic media (2010).

“Many children today find it easier to stay indoors and watch television. I worry that children do not know what they are missing. Children cannot love what they do not know. They cannot miss what they have not experienced.”

~ Mary Pipher, The Shelter of Each Other

Source: NICHD, 2006

School-aged children spend 7.5 hours a day on electronic media (2010).

“Go Outside and Play!”

Today’s children spend less time outdoors than ANY previous generation

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Only 10% of children are getting outdoors daily. (Nature Conservancy, 2011)

Source: Keiser Family Foundation (2010)

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**Creating a Nature-Based Culture**

**But, It’s Not ALL Bad News…**

Healthier, Happier, Stronger Kids!

- Become fitter and leaner
- Develop stronger immune systems
- Have more active imaginations
- Have lower stress levels
- Play more creatively
- Have greater respect for themselves and others

**Children who play outside regularly:**

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Source: Andrea Faber Taylor, Frances E. Ming Kuo, 2011.

Kids with ADHD who regularly play outside in settings with lots of green, such as grassy open fields and parks, have milder ADHD symptoms than children who play indoors or at playgrounds.

- Better sleep
- Reduced nearsightedness
- Vitamin D exposure
- Benefits for adults too


**Outdoor Play vs. Indoor Play**

- Increased MVPA
- Testing physical skills & abilities
- Building strength & coordination

**Philosophy**

- Guides our practice
- Provides the framework for intentional planning, teaching and programming
- Allows us to share with others the “why” behind our work (staff, parents, funders, etc.)

“I sincerely believe that for the child, and for the parent seeking to guide him, it is not half so important to know as to feel when introducing a young child to the natural world. If facts are the seeds that later produce knowledge and wisdom, then the emotions and the impressions of the senses are the fertile soil in which the seeds must grow. The years of early childhood are the time to prepare the soil.”

- Rachel Carson, A Sense of Wonder

The brain grows primarily due to the experiences and the environment it is exposed to in the early years. As a result, nature experiences are critical for the healthy development of all brain areas. If we want children to develop to their optimal abilities, they must have the opportunity to learn through nature activities.

- Deborah McNelis

Brain Insights
Your philosophy challenge:
Create a description of your goals and beliefs as a teacher, administrator or caregiver regarding the role of nature and the outdoor environment.

No right or wrong...think of it as a working draft!

Take a minute...

Has anyone one they want to share?

The Staff

Have a philosophy in place that the entire staff agree upon and support.
• Create it together
• Post it for all to see
• Use it in marketing materials & on your website if you have one
• Share it in parent meetings, back to school nights, etc.
• Support it in your take home messages

Facilitate children's thinking and learning as they discover meaningful experiences...

Move from thinking about risk...

To thinking about risk-benefit.

http://www.playengland.org.uk

Talk about reasonable risks and its benefits with your staff, the families, the licensing board and your insurance agent.

• Educate
• Advocate
• Inspire common sense
Assess & collect data

Think of the outdoors as your classroom. EVERY DAY.

What support does my staff need to make this happen?

Embrace MESS.

Dress the part!

Change your vocabulary & frame of reference...

Goodbye playground...

Hello outdoor learning environment!!

The Where...

Poll #2
“A three year old child is a being who gets almost as much fun out of a fifty-six dollar set of swings as it does out of finding a small green worm.”
~ Bill Vaughan

“When children play in natural environments, their play is more diverse with imaginative and creative play that fosters language and collaborative skills.”

Keep in mind:
- Mixed-use & open space
- Sensory experiences
- Risk-taking opportunities
- Safety
- Natural elements

Health benefits and opportunities for academic and social development are associated with well designed outdoor play spaces which promote play and interaction with natural elements.

Welcome to America!
Stop & Think...

Do you put as much thought into planning your outdoor environment as your indoor?
How many learning stations do you have outdoors?

Consider the possibilities...

Mixed Use + Open Space

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How many learning stations do you have outdoors?

Consider the possibilities...
Creating a Nature-Based Culture

Create discovery pockets

Science & Math Zones

Make Room for RISK!
Creating a Nature-Based Culture

Behold the power of GREEN.

Celebrate critters!

Go GAGA for loose parts!

and small
Creating a Nature-Based Culture

Bethe Almeras, Head Start Body Start

9/28/2011

Creating a Nature-Based Culture

1. Natural and man-made

2. Create a welcoming atmosphere

3. Tap into community resources....

4. Explore your community’s wild side

5. Questions?

6. The What...
“It is paradoxical that many educators and parents still differentiate between a time for learning and a time for play without seeing the vital connection between them.”

~ Leo Buscaglia
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On the MOVE!

Appropriate challenges & real world practice...

See the math potential...

Preschool Math

Photo credit: Juliet Robertson

Courtesy of Juliet Robertson.

Oh the things we will learn!

Let's think about literacy...
A handful of inspiration…

What skills did I work on?

How about here?!
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MON</th>
<th>TUES</th>
<th>WED</th>
<th>THUR</th>
<th>FRI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read: The Busy Little Squirrel</td>
<td>Play with 3-D shapes</td>
<td>Go on an acorn hunt</td>
<td>Make a fall obstacle course</td>
<td>Build a squirrel nest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play on a color orange tree around center</td>
<td>Create a squirrel tale</td>
<td>Make a fall obstacle course</td>
<td>Read: The Busy Little Squirrel &amp; make art</td>
<td>Hold tight to the pumpkin patch</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Mon to Fri**

- **Read:** The Busy Little Squirrel
- **Play:** Plant a tree, make a tree, grow a tree
- **Create:** Make a squirrel tale, make a squirrel nest, make a squirrel obstacle course
- **Go on an acorn hunt:** Make a fall obstacle course
- **Make a fall obstacle course:** Read: The Busy Little Squirrel
- **Build a squirrel nest:** Hold tight to the pumpkin patch

**Music:** Ladybugs’ Picnic

- **Make bagel or pine cone bird feeders**
- **Make binoculars & play Spot the Cardinal**
- **Fly like happy birds, sad birds, tied birds…**
- **Go on a bird behavior hike!**
- **Make bird watching journals & go observe**

**Fort Building Adventure!**

- **Let’s go rock hunting**
- **What do you like about fall?**
- **Super spider day — make a web**
- **Build a web**

**Outdoor play grows young minds and bodies!**

- **The Families…**

**Creating a Nature-Based Culture**

- **art**
- **science**
- **math**
- **language dev & literacy**
- **music**
- **health & nutrition**
- **physical activity**
- **social & emotional**

**Poll #3**

- **The Families…**

- **Outdoor play grows young minds and bodies!**

- **Create Nature Tables**

- **Taking the outdoors in…**
Keys to Success

- Share right from the beginning
- Educate about the health, wellbeing and learning benefits
- Take them on a tour of the outdoor environment
- Show progress info JUST like you do for inside the classroom
- Invite them to get involved

Motto: Come prepared for a learning adventure!

- Proper clothing – year round
- Sunscreen
- Shade & water
- Anticipate their questions (Green Desk)
- Embrace mess...

Host an Outdoor Family Day or event!

On the Web

- www.headstartbodystart.org
- www.naturalearning.org/
- www.naturegrounds.org/
- www.childrennature.org
- www.naturefind.com/

Resources

- Assessment Tool
- Green Desk
- Plants for play database
- Lots of research
- Find nearby nature spots

Strong and healthy families & communities

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Inspiring Blogs
- www.grassstainguru.com
- www.eyesonnature.blogspot.com
- www.progressiveearlychildhoodeducation.blogspot.com
- www.kindlingplayandtraining.blogspot.com
- www.goexplorenature.com
- www.creativestarlearning.blogspot.com
- www.squigglemum.com
- www.kindlingplayandtraining.blogspot.com

See it in action – videos!
- Outdoor Preschool, Norway
  http://vimeo.com/danmartland/forestpreschool
- Forest Preschool in Seattle, WA
  http://almeras.com/terrendeforestpreschool
- Woodhaven School, Beaverton Oregon
  http://youtu.be/OC8qP5hitA4
- Nature Action Collaborative It's a Beautiful Life
  http://youtu.be/wh0N5iNqNkw
- Nature-Based Play, US
  http://youtu.be/y7vRlFWtauo

Questions?

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