

Creating a Nature-Based Culture
in Your Program



Presented by Bethe Almeras, MS
September 28, 2011

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



- 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



Bethe Almeras, MS
The Grass Stain Guru

"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!!!

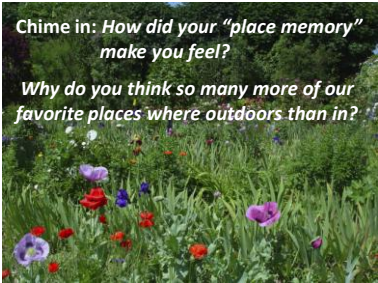
Note the hot 70's fashion.

Poll #1



Chime in: How did your "place memory" make you feel?

Why do you think so many more of our favorite places where outdoors than in?

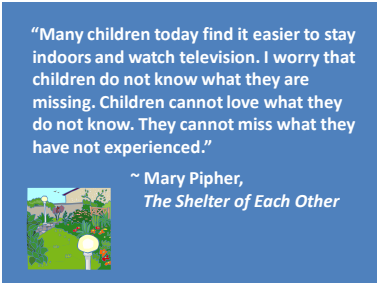
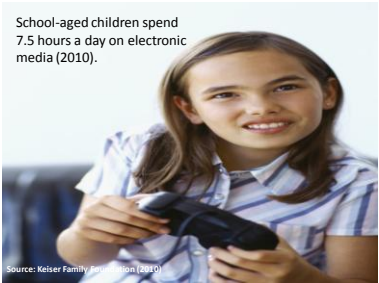
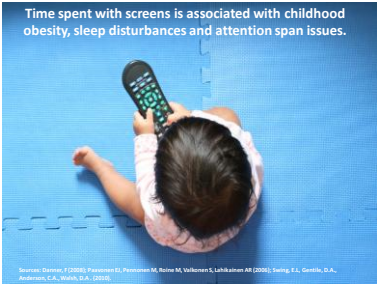
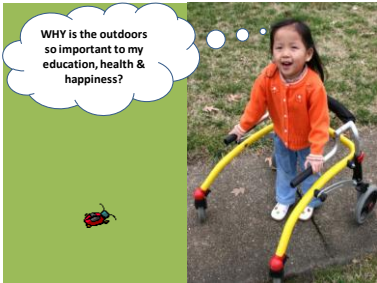


5 Steps to Success

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...





But, It's Not ALL Bad News...



Healthier, Happier, Stronger Kids!

Children who play outside regularly:

- 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



Source: 2004, Nordette and Whitaker 2005.

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.



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



- 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


Source: Patricia C. Kuhl, 2004. Community Involvement Collaborative for Kids Research, 2005.

Philosophy

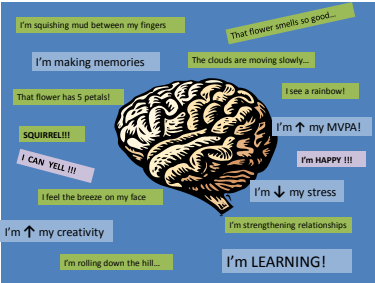


- Guides our practice
- Provides the framework for intentional planning, teaching and programming
- Allows us to share with others the “why” behind our work (staff, parents, funders, etc.)

“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*



Experiences around the brain:

- I'm squishing mud between my fingers
- That flower smells so good...
- I'm making memories
- The clouds are moving slowly...
- That flower has 5 petals!
- I see a rainbow!
- SQUIRREL!!!
- I'm ↑ my MVPA!
- I CAN YELL!!!
- I'm HAPPY!!!
- I feel the breeze on my face
- I'm ↓ my stress
- I'm ↑ my creativity
- I'm strengthening relationships
- I'm rolling down the hill...
- I'm LEARNING!

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 McNeilis
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...



Does anyone have 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...



Lesson, Jordana & Ouchiey, 1999, 2010

Move from thinking about risk...



Photo credit: Waga O'Leary

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





“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



Forest preschool, Sweden



Preschool, Norway



Preschool, New Zealand

Photo credit: Anja Gebert



Outdoor Playscape, Germany



Welcome to America!



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.

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

Source: Moore & Wang 1997; Taylor, et al. 1998; Spence 2000



Intentional Design

Keep in mind:

- ✓ Mixed-use & open space
- ✓ Sensory experiences
- ✓ Risk-taking opportunities
- ✓ Safety
- ✓ Natural elements







Photo credit: Squigglesman



Create discovery pockets



Photo credit: Jenny Kable



<http://saxiggleman.com>



Science & Math Zones

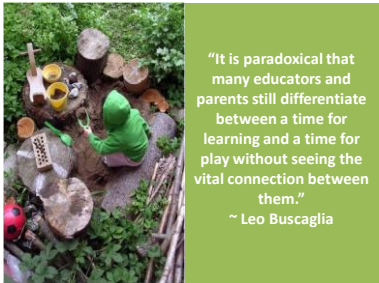


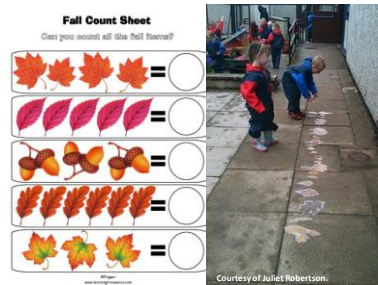
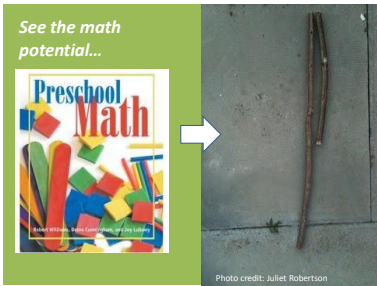
Make Room for RISK!

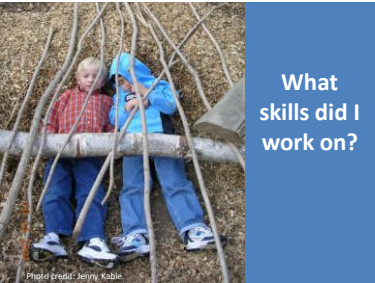
Photo credit: Jenny Kable







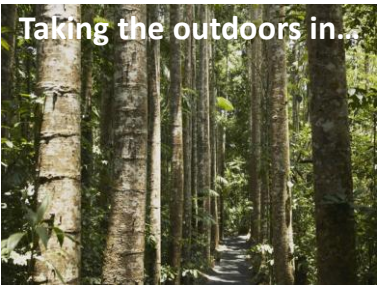






- art
- science
- math
- language dev & literacy
- music
- health & nutrition
- physical activity
- social & emotional

MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI
Read: The Busy Little Squirrel	Play Secret Squirrel Stash	Go on an acorn hunt	Do grasping w/ acorn tops	Build a squirrels nest
Go on a color orange hike around center	Create a nature table	Make a fall obstacle course	Read: Leaf Man & make craft	Field trip to the pumpkin patch
Plant a class tree	Rake leaves into piles & jump in them. Move leaves in wheelbarrows	Little Explorers: Logs!	Move like: A falling leaf; A tree in the wind; A squirrel on a branch...	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	Read: It's Fall! What do you like about fall?	Super spider day -- Web Hunt	Build a web







Create Nature Tables





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



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



Resources



On the Web

Assessment tool www.headstartbodystart.org

Green Desk www.naturelearning.org/

Plants for play database www.naturegrounds.org/

Lots of research www.childrennature.org

Find nearby nature spots www.naturefind.com/



Inspiring Blogs


www.grassstainguru.com
www.eyesonnature.blogspot.com
www.progressiveearlychildhoodeducation.blogspot.com/
www.kindlingplayandtraining.blogspot.com/
www.squigglemum.com
www.creativestartlearning.blogspot.com/
www.goexplorenature.com

See it in action – videos!


Outdoor Preschool, Norway
http://youtu.be/Fp4Nny_rliw
Forest Preschool in Seattle, WA
<http://vimeo.com/danmartland/forsetschool>
Woodhaven School, Beaverton Oregon
<http://youtu.be/QoIQsphAyNI>
Nature Action Collaborative It's a Beautiful Life
<http://youtu.be/wG0QALNLeXw>
Nature-Based Play, US
<http://youtu.be/y7uRiFWtauo>





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Join the conversation

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