



From Conflict to Harmony

How Natural Outdoor Classrooms Can Help Address Behavioral Challenges and Support Children's Well-Being

Your special childhood place



Nature-filled Environments





The Problem

Children's Growing Disconnection From Nature

The Problem: Contributing Factors

- Occupied with TV and Video Games
- Lack of access to green space
- Stranger Danger
- Frightening media images or environmental problems causing "biophobia"
- Getting dirty



The Problem: Attitude Shift

Children's attitude toward nature is shifting from wonder and enjoyment to fear and dislike.

53% reported dislike or fear of nature



The Problem: Outdoor Spaces

Common outdoor play spaces for today's children are devoid of rich natural learning experiences.



Research

- Enhanced observation skills
- Improved concentration (especially beneficial for children with Attention Deficit Disorder – ADD)
- Greater recovery from cognitive fatigue
- Improved fine motor skills



Research

“Children’s stress levels fall within minutes of seeing green spaces.”

“Earthing (grounding) is placing the human body in direct contact with elements of the earth.”

- Rapid calming effect
- Improves blood pressure
- Supports sensory differences
- Better heart rhythms
- Increased immune systems

Research

- Facilitates Social Development and Well-Being
- Improves Physical Fitness
- Supports Creativity and Imaginative Play
- Inspires Collaborative Play
- Reduces Violence and Bullying
- Reduces Stress
- Creates Empathy for Plants and Animals

Research

Critical Thinking
Problem Solving
Science
Language and Literacy
Math
Visual-Spatial Thinking
Construction and Engineering



Christopher and the Tomato





"Post-occupancy Study of Nature-based Outdoor Classrooms" – Dr. Sam Dennis



"Compared to both indoor and traditional playgrounds, children in outdoor natural settings were reported to be more relaxed, happier, less impulsive, more focused, more creative and better behaved."

(Dennis 2014)

Program Philosophy

Physical Layout of Outdoor Space

Routine and Activities

Educator Practices

Program Philosophy

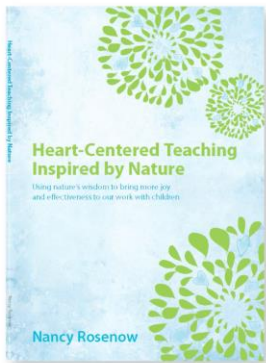






What do I believe about children?



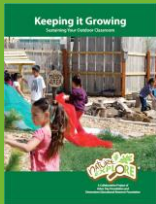




“People will only truly thrive once they’ve experienced being fully accepted for who they are, not what they do.”

-Carl Rogers

Unconditional Positive Regard

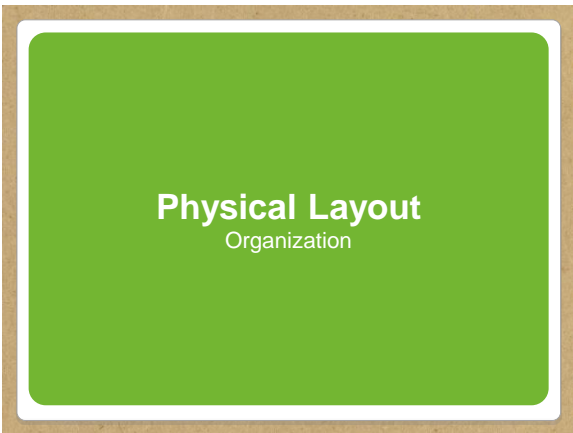


“For children to thrive and reach their full potential, they need environments that appropriately match who they are in body, mind, emotions, and spirit.”
- Ruth Wilson

Physical Layout



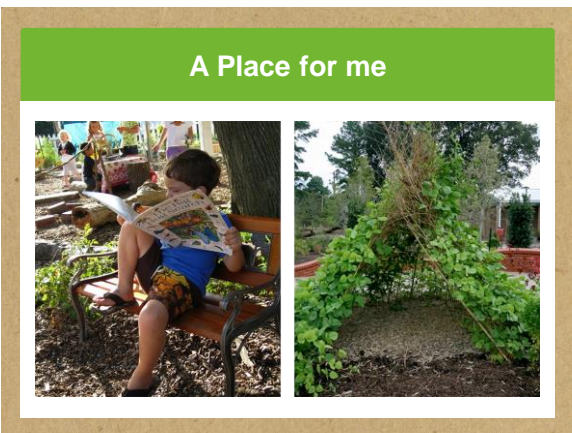












Using plant material to define areas



"Often on the edge of more well-defined areas—such as underneath boundary shrubs—these spaces supported a number of positive behavioral and emotional outcomes. These include self-calming, solitary experiences... help in recovery from overwhelming sensory stimuli, and a strong connection to a special place."

(Dennis 2014)





Physical Layout

Organization
Storage



Storage





Physical Layout
Organization
Storage
Variety of nature's beauty









Routine and Activities





Routine and Activities
Time







Routine and Activities

Time
Many choices

Variety of Positive Experiences



Include a complete mix of experiences



Climbing and Balance



Science and Math



Language and Literacy



Art, Music & Movement, Dramatic Play



Construction / Engineering



Gross Motor with large "loose parts"



Digging (Sand and/or Dirt)



Wheeled-toy Area ... and more







Routine and Activities
Time
Many choices
Loose parts and plenty of them













Natural Materials

- Corn (cobs, husks, kernels)
- Dirt
- Driftwood
- Gourds
- Grasses
- Hedge apples
- Leaves
- Milkweed pods
- Nuts (acorns, pecans)
- Pine cones
- Pumpkins
- Rocks
- Recycled Christmas trees
- Sand
- Sea shells
- Sticks/branches
- Straw/ hay
- Stumps/logs
- Tree bark
- Tree cookies
- Willow poles
- Wood chips
- Wood chunks

Routine and Activities

Time
Many Choices
Loose Parts and Plenty of Them
Caretaking

Capacity for Caretaking





Educator Practices









Program Philosophy

Physical Layout of Outdoor Space

Routine and Activities

Educator Practices

I Am Confident & Capable



Freedom to Express Yourself



Peaceful Natural Setting





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natureexplore.org
