



“Designing Nature-Rich Spaces That Support Community Connection and Change”

Heather Fox, MLS
Outreach Director
HeatherF@natureexplore.org

Jeff Lindstrom, CLARB
Senior Designer / Project Manager
JeffL@natureexplore.org

1



Our mission is to inspire joy and wonder in children, educators, and communities with a heart-centered approach to early education.

501(c)3 Nonprofit Organization



2



Professional Development



Outdoor Classroom Design Services



Natural Products

3



Today's Agenda

- What is an Outdoor Classroom?
- Research
- Design Process
- Inspiring Stories
- Tips & Tricks
- Q&A Session
- Design Consultation Scholarship

4



5

What is an Outdoor Classroom?



6



7



8

Elements of an Outdoor Classroom

- Accessibility
- Gross motor play
- Fine motor play
- Rich sensory experiences
- Loose parts & variables
- Gathering areas
- Different "behavior settings"
- Plants and natural materials



9



"Students who spend time in well-designed Nature Explore Classrooms with nurturing adults develop valuable skills across all learning domains."
 – Miller, 2007

Post-occupancy Study

"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 able to self regulate."

— Dr. Sam

Dennis, 2014



10



"Playgrounds dominated by asphalt, turf and manufactured equipment have a built-in bias toward competitive gross motor play and 'burning off steam.' ...With a purposeful balance and arrangement of activity areas, the outdoor classroom engages more children."

— Haugen 2019



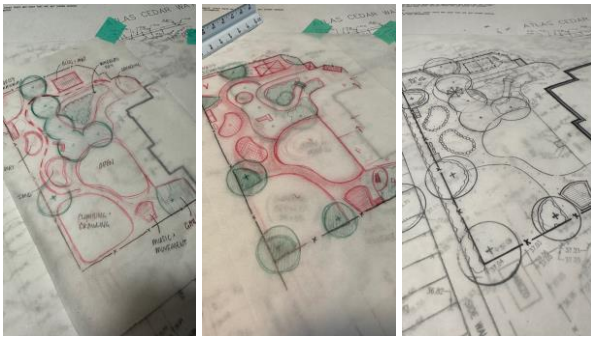
11



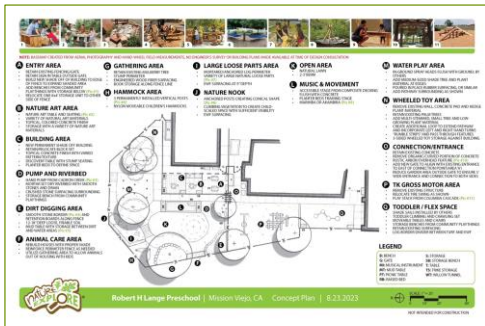
Design Principles

- Include a well-rounded mix of activity areas
- Divide the space into clearly delineated areas for each activity
- Give areas simple names
- Identify each area with a sign or other sensory cues
- Be sure all areas are visible at all times
- Meet all local licensing and regulatory standards
- Use a variety of natural materials
- Choose elements for durability, sustainability and easy care
- Maximize beauty and clarity in the overall design
- Personalize your design

12



13



14



15





16



17



18

Inspiring Stories

- Building Community
- Cost-Conscious
- Long-term planning



19



Tiny Tots Development Center

Seattle, WA

20



21



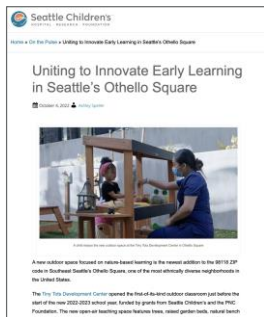
22

Blank lined writing area.



23

Blank lined writing area.

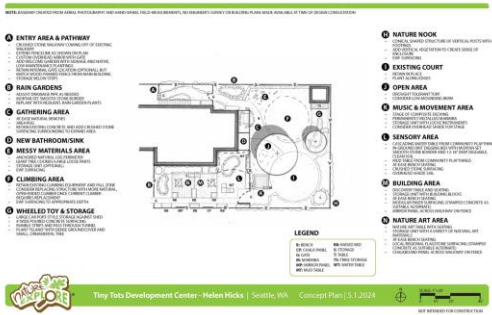


24

Blank lined writing area.



25



26



American School of Marrakech

Marrakech, Morocco

27



28



29



30



31



32



33



Spaces of Opportunity

Phoenix, AZ

34



35



36



37



38



Considerations & Tips

39



Tips for Engaging Community

- Communicate your “WHY”
- Include them in the design process
- Bring people into your space (before & after)
- Include volunteers throughout
- Partner with existing organizations
- Share your successes

40



Tips for Cost-Conscious Building

- Bigger is not always better, but it is more expensive
- Work with what you have; reuse before replace
- Utilize locally available materials & skillsets
- Understand site access and limit mobilizations
- Plan for maintenance
- Limit custom features
- Be clear in your donation/fundraising asks

41



Tips for Long-term Success

- Establish a maintenance plan **AND** team
- Irrigation whenever possible
- Incorporate curriculum and pedagogy
- Continued staff development
- Create emotional connections to the space
- Establish a leadership team
- Continue adding to the story

42



43

Q&A Session



44

Design Scholarship



45

Scholarship Deliverables

- (1) Online "Philosophy and Visioning Session"
- (1) Online Professional Development workshop
- (1) B&W concept plan
- (1) Written project summary
- (1) List of loose parts and furnishings



Scholarship Details

- This is for the design of one outdoor classroom
- Application due Friday, June 14th at 12:00pm CST
- In order for your application to be complete, you must answer all of the questions below AND submit site pictures to info@natureexplore.org
- Recipient announced on Monday, July 1st
- Questions? email: info@natureexplore.org

46



Apply for our First Design Consultation Scholarship!



Note: We will send the link in follow-up email

47



Thank you!

Heather Fox
 Outreach Director / ECE
HeatherF@natureexplore.org

Jeff Lindstrom
 Senior Designer / Project Manager
JeffL@natureexplore.org

© 2024 Dimensions Foundation

48