The Minnesota Experience: Identifying Challenges and Strategies  
**Group A (MacMillan Auditorium)**  
Children in Nature: Healthy Development by Design Conference  
Minnesota Landscape Arboretum - November 6, 2008

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1. Introduction of participants:  
   Not recorded

2. Specific factors that challenge you in the work of connecting children to nature

   - Getting info to parents and letting them know the benefits of nature experience. It’s difficult to get parents to think in different ways
   - Funding is a significant challenge of non-profits and education centers. Teachers not well paid in these settings and consequently staff turnover is high
   - To piggy back the previous point, if there is not enough funding or support then users will have to foot the bill for the nature experience and this creates an access issue
   - Need to keep tuitions to nature schools and pre-schools affordable so that it is not seen as a luxury for those who can afford it
   - Increase accessibility
   - What about places where there is no outdoor space?
   - Traveling offsite is a challenge because teachers focus on the logistics of transportation and safety and are not as able to facilitate nature play learning experiences
   - Staff turnover is a huge challenge
   - Liability in structured situation like parks and schools is a big obstacle
   - Urban schools are especially challenged to form connection with environment
     - School administration lacks funding
     - Teacher and parent buy in
     - Perception of dangerous urban neighborhoods
     - Video games
   - Time. Finding time to fit in nature experience with all of the other expectations
   - Expand our definition of nature so that it can include places that are accessible to anybody’s home. The challenge is not to limit our thinking about what nature is or should be
   - Nature connectedness: what is connection to nature and how often do we need to experience it?
   - A strengths-based approach is needed. The “deficit” model is negative. Instead we need a more asset based, positive approach that focuses on what experience with nature provides not what we are missing without nature experience
   - Built environment is a challenge. Windowless work spaces and classrooms are a real barrier to nature experience.
• Need to reframe our thinking about learning and realize that learning can go on outside in minimally structured natural environments
• Anything you learn inside can be learned outside
• Challenge is to communicate about nature through the heart and spirit as well as with the research
• Parent education
• Fear factor
• Need to get credit for smaller nature areas close to home. Be explicit about what these nature spaces provide the community in terms of recreation but also environmental services such as runoff remediation, water filtration, wildlife habitat, etc.
• Liability
• Formal education does not recognize the learning opportunities and benefits of unstructured, free choice activity in a natural space. Informal education is not valued enough and certainly not seen as a necessary partner with formal education
• Challenge is to do something different. What is different about our place? How can we offer a different perspective on nature, get visitors to think differently
• Winter---how do you overcome the “fear of winter” perception gaps
• Fear of plants
• Fear of water-drowning and disease perception
• Nature needs to have an inclusive definition and points of view
• Appeal to multiple audiences-children and adults
• Environmental toxins---peanuts, chemicals, environmental contamination lead to fear about the environment and the thought that it is dangerous, fragile, and threatened
• Cultural perspectives- Begin with the spiritual connection. Yankton Dakota ---I am all that is related, I am connected with everything. Spirituality comes first or is it science and research. Cultural congruency
• Disconnect and historical trauma when children sent to boarding schools. Deconstruction of the culture. Particular challenge in the Native culture is to reestablish the connection to nature
• How do we create communities so that spending time in nature is not “expensive”?
• How do we work together on these issues? We are challenged to do community building

3. Specific suggestions that would help overcome challenges

• Take down fences---neighborhood coalitions
• Institutional barriers move outside of institutions into neighborhoods
• Fences increase use. They define space and make people feel secure. Appropriate barriers in nature may increase use and decrease parental anxiety. Create “off leash” opportunities
• What kinds of fences to construct are important? Nature has natural boundaries and borders
• Need to build shared value and trust around these issues
• Need a communications campaign with the media to frame the issue in a positive light
• We all can handle the nature all winter long as long as we have the proper clothing
• How do we work with tech and multiple mediums to engage people in nature? Use tech to turn people on to nature. Instead of a diametric opposition
• How to communicate to user parents about the importance of nature and children
• Combat NCLB
• Communicate benefits to parents from the standpoint that this will be important for their kid
• Crystallize the talking points around this issue
• Understand the power of youth to influence the elders
• Lobby school board and get new school board leaders who are supportive
• Provide experience to children and then let them choose
• Video games are social. Maybe nature needs to be marketed as a social experience
• As a society we need to view things less sanitized and less germ crazed