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

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1. Introduction of participants:
Represented groups listed below
- Park & Rec administrator
- Landscape architect
- Museum educator
- Museum exhibit designer
- City planner
- Native American planner
- Foundation staff
- Naturalist in experiential education
- State Dept of Health program coordinator, partner with DNR
- School teacher
- State Forest education program coordinator DNR
- University child care center director

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

- Technology. Kids would rather stay inside even in great weather
- Money. Dollars keep schools from being able to visit and do fieldtrips
- Problem with licensing. Tremendous fear around what we are doing when what we should be fearing is the results of not doing anything. e.g. problem health dept standards and human service standards – if want to put in dragonfly pool, problem with water.
- Need research evidence to justify work
- Liability and insurance concerns. Risks are high for being sued if you deviate from play area standards.
- Public perception of natural areas is a problem – people think an open space is just forgotten space. The safety issue also concern for parks and rec.
- Teacher and parent skills and comfort level outdoors are low. Teachers can’t manage class outside – they don’t receive any training for handling kids outdoors. No licensure required involving outdoor education
- Used to get in trouble for taking kids outside in public schools
- Young parents uncomfortable in outdoors as social setting – parents don’t know about hiking, hunting, bird watching
- SCORE testing in Oregon – higher divorce rates = more single parents with lack of time, lack of companionship, can’t get to recreation spot – won’t go +30 miles (gas too high)
• Kids can’t play outside because of paranoia – fear of strangers for safety
• Teacher credentialing and licensure – how to incorporate these ideas. People are not skilled, so how do we get model demonstration and training sites within Universities?
• Need moral transformation of social values to make this a priority. But this issue does not rank against things like the economy. Time spent in nature is not being valued. Elevate it to a major concern – do we want to change?
• With most households now have both parents at work, kids in after school programs, less able to go outside. Disappearance of the free flowing more informal play time after school.
• Single parenthood makes all the gritty details more difficult
• Strategy in Native American community is nation building – reconnecting kids to tribal ways. Children born with 4 rights - right to name, right to place, right to plan, right to purpose. The developmental process in the culture is for kids to move from little space to bigger space. This happens simultaneously with a progression of their growth in power, abilities to act in the space. Example: Age 4-6 yrs gather kindling, 10-11 yrs ax, 20 yrs chainsaw

**Moderator: – summary**

• Culture is pluralistic, has developed bureaucratic ways to coordinate across different cultures

**Other factors not mentioned yet:**

• Loss of available land (depends on where you live --- small spaces can be big, we’re not using them well)
• Mentality to stay on the trail, don’t destroy the place
• Conflicts for NR managers who must safeguard a place (touch gently, leave only footprints) vs. those advocating for get off trail and romp
• Rigid curriculum in schools.
• Challenge for museum is to figure out how to keep them on trails, preserve the site, make it wild and yet keep it going. How do we perceive ourselves in the built and natural environments? What is our role? How to make it an outdoor adventure

**What are the three main themes?**

CULTURAL - Changing family, parents lacking time, lacking resources, over programmed kids

EDUCATION – Public, how to accomplish the connection, why it makes a difference

CHANGING FAMILY – COMMUNITY - SOCIETY VALUE – cultural shift; difference in values; multiple levels. May need to address different ways
3. Specific suggestions that would help overcome challenges

- Society needs to be changed, newspapers won’t do it. Funding for summers to employ kids to take out invasive plants
- Youth involvement and participation
- More after school care at nature centers, find lost spaces around us and make it more natural. There are extra spaces around the city – could be transformed
- Economic pressures mean families can’t spend time together but just don’t have time. Need more role models
- 2 lost generations – kids don’t know. Young parents don’t know what to do. Strategies – building programs for both parents and kids
- On Reservation – hiring elders to work with middle group to work with the kids. Re-empowering our young people’s right place. Multi generational and mentoring. Grandparents working with young adults who will work with the kids.
- Maybe a depression will make people cook for themselves. Also brings people together
- Policy change comes from civic and private engagement. Kids need to feel they are stakeholders.
- In park planning – new idea to engage nature, leave spaces that are wild, add plants back in. Greening thru design
- Echoes this – localized resource use. Localized food production, people are learning and working together, getting outside and getting exercised. People are so far removed from their nature. Becoming more affluent has drowned out. Just growing tomatoes is huge.
- Important to make system transparent. People don’t know their food comes from far away. Engage teens in making decision about how to develop the park.
- Public education – community engage meant to change policy – must be ready to say what. Now must identify stakeholder

FAMILY PARENTING VALUE CHANGE
BUILT ENVIRONMENT
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

- Now goes back to licensure questions. Educators and legislators need to understand importance of outdoor work in education
- But policy is the long term change. Immediate problem is to understand the perception. Community engagement on importance of steps to get to Policy makers. Then we can see change in business
- On the Reservation, tourism comes into our territory. We are setting aside areas in our territories for non-natives to play in the woods’ – e.g. ATV’s. We are setting aside separate areas for our own hunting, sustaining activities, but we are not helping these others think differently about the areas if we are not training them
- Community engagement – must see the value, understand the importance. I like the idea of engaging elders, retired generation to come into school – try to help reconnect kids.
- Need to have people from all age groups.
- Whole idea of community has shifted in our culture. Don’t get to know our neighbors anymore. We have online communities instead – all virtual. Get to know extended family, worthy of taking a look at. Community changes – more isolated from one another.