The Minnesota Experience: Identifying Challenges and Strategies
Group D (Snyder 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**

   **Top 3 Challenges**
   - Fear of nature and concern about safety issues
   - Adult teacher education and parent involvement
   - Space management

   **Other Challenges**
   - Space and environment provided by school and/or the lack of outdoor space
   - Safety and design that does not impede the freeform environment of play
   - Removing greenery to reduce crime
   - Concern/misunderstanding of parents (IE: Putting sticks out for kids to explore and play with and the concern of a segment of parents who think the children are using weapons)
   - Funding
   - Fear of children playing unsupervised
   - Entrenched ideas about what we can do…the playground must look a particular way
   - Resistance to change, doing it a different way
   - Teachers are afraid to go out into nature (IE: tick phobia)
   - Fear of nature
   - Adults project their fear of nature onto their children
   - Parent education and effective parent involvement
   - Educational standards (NCLB) restrict teacher flexibility
   - Lack of alternatively designed environments to use as models
   - Lack of cross-pollination of ideas and resources. Need for more networking to learn about work that other people are doing for program providers
   - Mixed age group environment expectations (IE if you design for preschool, what else can it be used for?)
   - Overburdened teachers who are hesitant to try new things outdoors, teachers’ lack of time, lack of school support for outdoor activities
   - Public vs. private spaces in schools and community centers
   - Safety
• Perception of aesthetics…growing areas are “messy” (IE: letting the weed observation area grow looks unkempt and untidy): Lack of understand about how to take care of an outdoor space and what it will look like
• Management and maintenance expectations: Lack of resources to train for new maintenance techniques
• Lack of empirical research and a conduit for it to be dispersed to direct program service providers
• Challenge to assess the outcomes and benefits of natural education and activities
• The term play is viewed as a pejorative term rather than an essential experience for healthy human development
• Lack of understanding of the value of a sensory-rich environment for critical child development

3. Specific suggestions that would help overcome challenges
(Top 3 Solutions)
• Educate and engage parents and teachers
• Paradigm shift about the term play
• Increased evidence, research, proof about the value of nature

(Other Solutions)
• Literature review for design practitioners
• Information that is available for a wide variety of audiences about the value of nature (Principal, funders, practitioners)
• Paradigm shift about the term play (calling it exploration, activity, discover, etc.)
• Positive media attention to the issue
• Summary information available on various topics of research at: www.lhhl.uiuc.edu
• Document the costs of management of the nature friendly play environment
• Provide information to the groups doing parenting classes about the value of nature
• Educating and engaging parents to the value so they can pass it on to their children
• Teach nature modeling behavior to parents

4. Stakeholders
• School boards
• Parents
• Community members
• Facility managers of schools, parks, etc.
• Business community and champions within it
• Children and Youth
• Health Care Community
• Potential Funders
• City planners (How space will be used)
• Legislators