1. Introduction of participants:

- Andrea Lorek Strauss - U of M Extension, Regional Extension Educator, Environmental Science Work involves working with families to connect to nature.
- Stephen Shurson – Landscape Architect, Three Rivers Park District - Planning and Development – develops play areas for parks.
- Kim Nowicki  - Interpretive naturalist, Three Rivers Park District -Eastman Nature Center
- Lynn Hagen - U of M Extension Master Gardener Program Coordinator, including youth programs, for Ramsey and Anoka Counties.
- Dave Moen – U of M Extension, state program manager for Master Gardener program – including Junior Master Gardener Program
- Judy Thompson - DNR Parks and Recreation, coordinates interpretive programs for one of four regions in state. One new initiative – partnering with a private group called Project Go –created as after school program alternative to traditional latchkey program.
- T Grant Louis - University of Minnesota doctoral candidate in Outdoor Ed. and Youth Development – dissertation topic involves program evaluation and nature deficit disorder,
- Nancy Nelson – MN Landscape Arboretum, Youth, Family, and Teacher Education - Early childhood and youth educator. The mission of our department is to create ways for people to explore the links between themselves, the earth as a hole, but particularly plants.
- Valerie Coit – University of Minnesota Extension, F H Program Coordinator out of Duluth – focus on environmental service learning.
- Jessica Kohl – University of Minnesota CDES graduate student, working on her thesis topic involving how children’s development is influenced by their built environment.
- Mike Horn  - Three Rivers Park District, designs play areas
- Cindy Check – ISD# 191 Early Childhood Program Coordinator (Burnsville-Savage area). She is at the beginning stages of creating an outdoor classroom in one center.

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

- Accessibility for urban residents. How to get children to the program site.
- How to create programs not so restrictive and support the concept of “free range” children
• The definition of nature can be restrictive in determining what to provide to children
• The parental philosophy that children need to be in structured activities all the time
• Liability issues for correct design / law
• Conquering parent’s fears about the potential dangers of being outside and interacting with the natural world
• Conquering fears of practitioners working with children. Many young practitioners (teachers, day care providers) did not have the outdoor experiences themselves as children. Without their own experiences to draw on, they are leery of involving the children in nature
• Competition with technology for children’s time
• Overcoming the “let me entertain you “mentality. Children expect activities to be created for them, not explore and create on their own
• A barrier to be immersed in parks and nature centers in the concern that allowing children to explore freely runs contrary to the mission to be stewards of the land
• People are looking for an “end result” or final product. Programs are not considered substantial if nothing is measurable— if they are just out there “playing
• Stakeholders need immediate results. They are not willing to take the time to work toward long range goals
• Parenting involves a sense of competition – play is a waste of time
• Initial motivation of children – how do you motivate kids who are unfamiliar with the natural world to overcome their fear
• Spending time in the natural world is not a priority to families. So many things are competing for time
• Creating outdoor spaces, time, and activities are not seen as resource generating so is not a priority
• Maintenance and management of play areas is often not as part of the development process and areas fall into disrepair. Maintenance is an issue for getting things designed and implemented – want low maintenance
• Engaging participants, maintenance, and management as part of the design process
• Solutions are interdisciplinary – many large organizational infrastructures oppose that kind of collaboration
• Parents struggle with how to decide what is the best for their children
• Traditional education system is not developing well rounded children, but passing tests

3. Specific suggestions that would help overcome challenges

• Documentation of impact – longitudinal studies and best practices would provide the information needed to “sell” the ideas
• While teaching children in an interpretive program, also teach the new theory to the adults. Teach them that what we are doing is important and healthy. It will help break down the barriers
• Create partnerships with Universities to do research, incorporate “better” practices
• Move away from idea of best practices to idea of better practices. It would create a paradigm shift to not having to think there in one true or correct approach
• Move away from the one size fits all mentality. Create the program or environment that suits your particular situation
• Get outside of our own boxes professionally – work more intuitively and not always toward a specific result
• Learn how to measure what people value. Find the values to measure and people will start buying in. Identify what is valued and measurable. Be sensitive to cultural differences
• Nature is not a program
• Retrain "good parenting". Give parents concrete ideas
• Create community again to help overcome fear of letting children outside. Communities were always watching each others kids
• Create family nature clubs
• Marketing campaign similar to MADD. “Unplug” campaign
• Nature is resilient – don’t fear destruction so much when considering fear exploration of natural area.
• Create “off-leash” kid parks- recreate exploration areas
• Identify stakeholders and what would be needed to help them with the effort of getting children outside (parents, caregivers, pediatricians, educators)
• Identify the “wise ones” influential people in the community and learn from them
• Broaden community involvement
• Partnership created
• Engage influential communities or disciplines -- technology community, city planners, k-12 education system, higher education system landscape architects, children, professionals in the field of recreation, environmental educators

T. Grant Lewis was chosen by the group to present to the full session. Time constraint did not allow for prioritizing suggestions- this was not done as a group.