The Minnesota Experience: Identifying Challenges and Strategies

Group F (Snyder Building, Classroom #2)
Children in Nature: Healthy Development by Design Conference
Minnesota Landscape Arboretum - November 6, 2008

Facilitator: Mary Vidas
Note-taker: Nancy Mulholland, MN Landscape Arboretum

1. Introduction of participants:
   Not recorded

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

   • What value is placed on experiential learning in nature?
   • Introducing urban youth to natural spaces
   • Perceived safety factor in large ‘green’ spaces
   • Educating immigrant families as to benefits of outdoor experiences
   • Awareness of different cultural traditions
   • Working with large numbers of children in short time period due to time/transportation constraints
   • What are the best designs to support educational venues?
   • Parent/family educations issues – “Bringing home the message”
   • Differing program expectations – can it be child-directed?
   • Placing value on unstructured learning and outdoor classrooms
   • The need to quantify can prohibit actions
   • Liability/safety issues
   • Competition with organized activities
   • Design/money constraints
   • Having a champion for the cause

3. Specific suggestions that would help overcome challenges

   • Taking cues from what “play” is for children
   • Networking with colleagues to exchange ideas
   • Learn from parents – Ask what they want/need to feel safe
   • Educate policy makers
   • Work with teachers – raise their comfort level with the “benefits of nature”
   • Educate & energize small groups to get behind the project
   • Partner with parents
   • Written guides for families to do things with their children just outside their own backdoor
   • Grassroots online communication – parent to parent
   • Integration of technology into nature – MP3, GPS
   • Create opportunities for children to be in nature
4. Stakeholders

- Families (including children)
- Educators
- Pre-K, Child care
- Media
- Policy makers (governing boards)
- Community leaders – urban areas & community leaders