

The Minnesota Experience: Identifying Challenges and Strategies

Group H (Azalea Classroom)

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

- Regarding Museums: There is not much nature currently in the museums. A few outreach programs. What happens is people come looking for a natural experience. Best thing we could do is to inspire all people to go out into nature. Part of the planning for the new facility (museum) is planning for an outdoor space.
- Space constraints are a challenge and lack of interest
- Lifelong concerns as a Teacher, Planner, Master Gardener:
 - Safety
 - Access
 - Time
- For Builders: Security and liability are big concerns.
- We had adventure playgrounds in the 60s and 70s, and then liability became a big issue. Now we have plastic play areas. We are enthused that we are coming full circle and seeing more free play and manipulated play for children.
- Unprepared children is a big concern. Parents cannot afford to send kids to school with proper clothing for playing outside and the school cannot always provide that.
- Another issue is that parents do not want messy kids.
- We do not have control over our climate: Being outside in different temperatures, the wind, rain, and snow. Opt for a treadmill on a rainy day vs. walking outside.
- Parents who did not get outside and play when they were young, probably will not send their kids outside to play.
- Education: Parents are not educated about the benefits of being outdoors. Most parents want the best for their kids. There is a gap in awareness of the benefits of being outdoors and the impact it has on their everyday life. Also spending time outdoors with children is in competition with time. Everyone is busy. We need education and balance.
- In health care it is a struggle to get people to realize the connection with children playing outdoors and being healthier kids. We should focus on the prevention of health problems. Challenge is selling the concept and funding it.
- Not much talk/focus about getting adolescents out in nature more.
- Disease: Wood ticks, mosquitoes and lime disease. They (parents and children) are afraid that they are going to get a disease and they are going to die if they play outside.

- TV and video games. Kids know names of actors on TV, but not their colors, numbers, etc.
- Technology is here to stay – it is a useful tool. We need a balance. Parents limit time of technology. Less than 2 hours a day leads to less obesity.
- Social Dynamics: Parents are afraid to let kids experience nature on their own. Media has changed environment (missing children). News being published nationally instead of locally.
- School lunches need to be healthier.
- After a field trip outdoors, kids go back home to family where they do not have access to outdoor activities. How do we get families out and connected once kids get go home from a field trip?
- Manicured lawns. No limbs, stumps, or dirt for the children to dig into.

3. Specific suggestions that would help overcome challenges

- Provide bug spray, light clothing for outdoor activities.
- Dodge Nature Center: Has a washing machine on-site. Some families need help with washing clothes. Children outgrowing outdoor clothing. Offer outdoor clothing (coats, mittens, hats, etc.). Most popular items that are used in outdoor activities: Rain pants, boots, mittens and hats. Families who come to Dodge usually spend time outside with kids so they have that connection. Facility is designed well for kids. They have Naturalists on Staff at Dodge.
- Awareness of Policy Makers --- so space is available to make natural spaces for kids
- Putting up a fence to contain the kids and let them enjoy that area outside
- Universal Health Care prevention for the future
- Regarding obesity and diabetes rates, they are doing a lot of programs to prevent this through schools
- Indoor air quality during winter months here in MN is poor. Rise in allergies is huge concern. Man-made carpets and materials used indoors are bad for children.
- Professionals found that kids raised in rural areas have fewer cases of asthma vs. kids raised in city.
- Being outdoors is a mood booster. Esteem and stress management. Great for mental health.
- Establish a school garden. Kids need to know where our food comes from and how we are connected to the earth. School lunches should be organic right from our gardens. Everything they grow can go into the school lunches. Direct impact on the kids - they will eat more salads, and love cutting their own food. Should be called Learning in Nature- Not just Children in Nature.
- Nature is chemistry, biology and physics. Have it be mandated in what our teachers teach. Break everything outdoors down into science, technology, engineering and math. Teachers need to do it as part of their jobs.
- Kids Cook at Loring School in Minneapolis. Kids and parents help water and care for gardens. Families love it. Kids harvest the food in the fall and cook with it.

- To get a garden growing at your school: Parents find out what county you are in. Then call the Master Gardeners and have the Master Gardeners adopt them - take it under their wings.
- Outdoor winter activities: Skiing, and ice fishing.
- Carver County has an alternative school for at-risk kids. They are doing overnight field trips. One field trip was to Wolf Ridge. The kids loved to lookout and lay on the rocks while looking at Lake Superior. They didn't know they could do day trips like this. Broaden their exposure to the treasures outdoors.
- Texting – simulation and accommodation. Website www.IBO.org
- Children and grandchildren connecting outdoors.
- Creating poetry signs outside in your yard or at schools, churches, etc. Kids take turns changing up the wording and creating their own poetry.
- Listen to the children. Favorite spots for kids outdoors are not what adults would choose.
- Let kids out to play by themselves. Parents step away and let the children do their own thing. At Tamarck Nature Center: Garden space, free play space, kids roam by themselves.
- Westwood Nature Center offers Winter Olympics simply by using water balloons, and kick sleds to race around on ice of lake.
- Parents need to leave a dirt area/outdoor open area in their lawn for the children to play in. It is free!!
- The area around the school is so critical – that is where kids are all day.
- Have to have a sense of mission about creating this opportunity for every school.
- Some parents who have the means would be willing to contribute to the school to have each student have an enriched experience.
- Ask maintenance people at the school to push snow in one big pile. Let kids go out and dig in the snow and teachers can talk about math, science, global warming, and sculptures. Even have a Winter Olympics.
- Budgeting outdoor clothing for children. Having items on site for kids. Maybe Putting signs up at retail stores asking for donations for the schools/kids - REI is a great source.

4. Stakeholders

- Parent Groups – PTA or non-school groups
- Churches- build family camps
- Home Schools
- Peace Center World Citizen Ace – worldcitizen.org
- Parks
- Staff, administration, counselors, psychologists at schools
- U of M Extension Service
- Pediatricians – telling kids to get outside so many hours per day.
- Department of Health/School Program - Coordinated Student Health Communities (eating better at lunch and getting outside more).
- ECFE
- Legal Community – safety and liability issues – Risk Mgmt.

- No child left inside – early literacy – a lot of cross over. Use nature and animal stories to get kids outside.
- Grandparents and Me in MN (might have the program name wrong): Is a program which gets grandparents out having outdoor experiences with grand kids.
- Assisted Living/Nature Preschools – new school coming out.
- Need to hook seniors in – Maybe having kids help seniors cook their garden foods.
- Volunteering: At the Arboretum we have over 800 volunteers. They are interested in learning and coming out here to volunteer gets them outside.