



Connecting our Children to Healthy Habits

Michele Hancock, Positive Parenting at Trinity

Ways We Promote Healthy Habits

- Growing nutritious meals
- Promoting positive experiences with meal preparation
- Natural outdoor classroom



Growing Nutritious Meals

- Outdoor gardens
 - The children are involved in selecting vegetables for our garden.
 - Local volunteers, center families and children participate in the upkeep of the garden. (i.e. planting, watering, weeding)
 - Grant funding helped supply initial materials for the garden. We also budget to include our garden grown vegetables in menu planning.



Gardening with Our Children



Gardening with Our Children



Promoting Positive Experiences with Meal Preparation

- We connect our meal preparation with curriculum to provide meaningful experiences to the young children in our care.
 - We “cook a book” .
 - Cooking together promotes positive social interactions between the children.
 - Cooking together aids in the development of the child’s self-help skills.



Why Cook?

- Cooking is a great motivator in reading. Participants are immersed in language development, concept building, sequence skills, comprehension and listening skills.
- Cooking is an active learning experience that incorporates math, science, health, nutrition and social studies.
- Every child has a chance to participate at his/her own level of engagement.



• Cooking experiences make the literature "real" to your children.

Making "Stone Soup"



The Stir Fry Project

- Cooking provides a way to try new things or make a healthy version of a favorite.
- This promotes healthy attitudes towards moderation in food selection.



The Stir Fry Project



Why a Natural Outdoor Classroom?

“Early experiences with the natural world have been positively linked to the sense of wonder. This way of knowing, if recognized and honored, can serve as a life-long source of joy and enrichment, as well as an impetus or motivation, for further learning.”

–Ruth A. Wilson, *The Wonders of Nature: Honoring Children’s Ways of Knowing*.



Why a Natural Outdoor Classroom?

The current movement to include nature in children’s outdoor learning environments is not only essential to learning but is backed by a growing amount of alarming research.



Natural Outdoor Classroom

- Disconnection with nature is leading to increases in childhood obesity, children's dislike and fear of the outdoors, increased reliance on behavior-regulating medications (Louv, 2005; Rivkin, 1995; White, 2004)



Why a Natural Outdoor Classroom?

- Between 1981 and 1997, the amount of time U.S. school children spent outdoors decreased by four hours a week while the time they spent indoors at school increased by almost five hours a week (Hoffert & Sandberg, 2000).



Why a Natural Outdoor Classroom?

- Research by Wilson and Simmons (1994) with children ages preschool to age nine found that many expressed more fear and dislike than appreciation, caring or enjoyment of natural aspects of the environment such as rain, wildlife, trees, or birds.



Why a Natural Outdoor Classroom?

- Many children no longer spend long, unstructured hours playing outdoors thus creating positive bonds with our natural world.
- Children need intentional experiences and spaces that provide them with the opportunity to experience and appreciate the natural world.



Ten Principles of the Nature Explore Classroom

- 1) Division of space in clear areas for different kinds of activities.
- 2) Include a complete mix of activity areas.
- 3) Give areas simple names.
- 4) Identify areas with signs/visual clues.
- 5) Be sure areas are visible at all times.
- 6) Use a variety of natural materials, including trees and other live plants.



Ten Principles of the Nature Explore Classroom

- 7) Choose elements for durability and low maintenance.
- 8) Maximize beauty and visual clarity in the over-all design.
- 9) Personalize the design with regional materials, and ideas from children and staff.
- 10) Be sure the space meets all regulatory standards for your region.



Getting Started

- To learn more contact Nature Explore at: <http://www.natureexplore.org/>
1-888-908-8733
- Develop a plan with center staff & a local landscaper if possible. Ask families and children for their input.
- Secure funding (grants, budgeting, community donations)



Getting Started

- Schedule training for center staff to promote understanding and unity.
- Find a mentor or accountability partner. Check in with each other to see that goals are being met.
- Don't give up. Start small if need be. Little changes mean a lot to the children in your program!



Our Playscape



Our Playscape



Our Playscape

