Research Papers

Children in Nature: A Need for Present &Future

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Abstract

The number of children who experience nature every day is decreasing dramatically. The evolution of technology that created gaming systems, ipods, personal computers, etc... has taken control of our children. As a result, children spend less time outdoors playing and more time indoors gaming. Thus, the sever increase in childhood obesity rates.

It is time to reconnect children with nature. Allow them to run through valleys and over hills, jump over fallen trees, watch insects build homes, plant and nurture a living organism; its time to let kids be kids and let nature show them how to truly play. A natural setting for play will increase children's physical activity level and keep children fit. Thus, lowering their chances of adolescent and/or adult obesity.

At Gardens for Living, we are strong advocates of Natural Playgrounds. We know that not everyone has easy access to fields and forests, and this where we come in. We design playgrounds that use the natural elements of a forest such as; fallen logs, hills, valleys and boulders, to create a natural environment that allows children to truly run and play.

Not only is nature a fun place to play, it is proven time and time again that children who frequent in nature have enhanced mental capacities, greater motor control, larger imaginations and greater creativity. Let nature teach our children.

Environmental Education

Environmental Education (EE) is a process in which individuals gain awareness of their environment and acquire knowledge, skills, values, experiences, and also the determination, which will enable them to act - individually and collectively - to solve present and future environmental problems.

Environmental Education is a complex process, covering not just events, but a strong underlying approach to society building as a whole. Environmental Education provides people with the awareness needed to build partnerships, understand NGO activities, develop participatory approaches to urban planning, and ensure future markets for eco-business.

Environmental education is a learning process that increases people's knowledge and awareness about the environment and associated challenges, develops the necessary skills and expertise to address the challenges, and fosters attitudes, motivations, and commitments to make informed decisions and take responsible action (UNESCO, Tbilisi Declaration, 1978).

Environmental education enhances critical thinking, problem-solving, and effective decision-making skills, and teaches individuals to weigh various sides of an environmental issue to make informed and responsible decisions. Environmental education does not advocate a particular viewpoint or course of action.

The components of environmental education are:

1. Awareness and sensitivity to the environment and environmental challenges
2. Knowledge and understanding of the environment and environmental challenges
3. Attitudes of concern for the environment and motivation to improve or maintain environmental quality
4. Skills to identify and help resolve environmental challenges
5. Participation in activities that lead to the resolution of environmental challenges.

Environmental Education Objectives

· Participation - to provide individuals, groups and societies with opportunities to be actively involved in exercising their skills of environmental citizenship and be actively involved at all levels in working towards sustainable development.

· Knowledge - to help individuals, groups and societies gain a variety of experiences in, and a basic understanding of, the knowledge and action competencies required for sustainable development

· Values - to help individuals, groups and societies acquire feelings of concern for issues of sustainability as well as a set of values upon which they can make judgements about appropriate ways of acting individually and with others to promote sustainable development

· Skills - to help individuals, groups and societies acquire the action competence or skills of environmental citizenship - in order to be able to identify and anticipate environmental problems and work with others to resolve, minimise and prevent them

· Awareness - to create an overall understanding of the impacts and effects of behaviours and lifestyles - on both the local and global environments, and on the short-term and long-term.

Some Principles of Environmental Education

· Environmental Education should be a part of all education
· Environmental problems are interdisciplinary
· direct experience in the natural world is an essential part of Environmental Education
· The way education happens is as important as content

The Way Ahead for Environmental Education

Some Activities and Games for children for boosting the morale related to enviornment are:

Sounds and Colors

by Joseph Cornell

Type of Activity: Focus attention
Qualities/Concepts: Auditory/Visual Awareness
Recommended Time and Environment: Day and night/anywhere
Number of Players: 1 or more people
Best Age Range: 3 years and up
Materials Needed: None

In a forest , meadow, marsh or park, a group of children sit or lie down on their backs with both fists held up in the air. Every time someone hears a new bird song he/she lifts one finger. Who has the best hearing? This is a wonderful way to make children aware of the sounds (and the stillness) of nature. For fun see if you can count to 10 without hearing a bird song. Vary the game by listening for general animal sounds - or for any sounds at all, like wind in the grass, falling leaves, rushing water. See if you can follow the wind as it flows through the forest. To get children to concentrate more deeply on any natural setting, ask them how many colors they can see in front of them without moving from where they are standing.

Blind Walk

by Joseph Cornell

Type of Activity: Direct Experience
Qualities/Concepts: Sensory awareness and trust
Recommended Time and Environment: Day / anywhere
Number of Players: 2 or more
Best Age Range: 7 years and up
Materials Needed: Blindfolds

It's very simple to organize and lead a blind walk. Form pairs, with mixed adults and children or children together, if they're mature enough. Each pair decides who'll be the leader first, and who'll be blindfolded. The leader guides his partner along any route that looks attractive - being very careful to

watch for logs, low branches and so on. The leader also guides his blind partner's hands to interesting objects, and brings him within range of interesting sounds and smell. Remember to demonstrate how to lead one's partner safely, and to remind the leaders that they are the eyes for their blindfolded partners.

When people try something new, they're often nervous and cover it up by joking and laughing. Since covering one's eyes is a new experience for many children, It's helpful to play the following game before a Blind Walk. Ask everyone to sit in a circle and each person is to use his sense of smell, touch, and possibly hearing to discover something new about the object. Have each player share his discovery before passing the object to the next player.

Find Your Age

by Joseph Cornell

Type of Activity: Direct Experience
Qualities/Concepts: Tree identification and biology, empathy
Recommended Time and Environment: Day/forest
Number of Players: 1 or more people
Best Age Range: 5 years and up
Materials Needed: Paper and pencil

In this activity each person tries to find a tree his/her own age. It's easy to estimate how many years a young pine spruce, larch or fir tree has, by counting its whorls or branches. In these trees you can see where one year's growth of branches all radiate out from the same band. Simply count the sets of branches and you'll have the approximate age of the tree. Be sure to add extra years for the branch whorls the tree has probably lost at its base. If you look closely you may be able to see scars where the old branches have broken off.

You'll find the best shaped young trees growing in open clearings, well away from the larger, more dominant trees. (This activity only works with trees up to about 25 years old, because as they grow older, it's difficult to estimate their age.)

Tell the players how a conifer tree grows - from the tip upwards. Each year's new growth grows beyond last year's new growth which stays at the same height. The youngest part of the tree is at the very top, while the oldest is at the bottom. The tree also grows from the tips of its branches and roots, as well as a little in diameter at the trunk each year. The trunk doesn't grow any higher, but stays at the same height. To see if the players understand this, you can ask the following question: "If I nailed a board five feet high on a tree, how much higher would it be after 30 years?" If they think the board will be higher ask them if they've ever seen a barbwire fence nailed to a tree - hanging twenty-feet form the ground!

To begin, write down the age of everyone in the group on a piece of paper. Then as a group look for trees that are the approximate age for each of the players. After this is done, have each player spend time studying the tree to see if he can tell anything about its growth and life. For example, I was studying a twenty-year old ponderosa pine, when I discovered I could see the history of northern California's rainfall reflected in its growth. Counting back in years from the top of the tree, I could see energetic growth between the branch whorls during rainy years, and little growth during the drought of the 80's.

Other things you can look for are fire scars; places where animals have used the tree, like deer rubbing their antlers, or bird nests; where another branch has taken over for a tip that was damaged (look for a bend in the trunk); and how its surroundings may have affected the tree.

After giving players time to get to know their tree, have each of them write a letter to their woodland friend. Then have everyone share what they have learned and felt about their special tree. In addition to teaching science, this activity encourages a wonderful sense of empathy and appreciation for trees and their lives.

Solo Hour in Nature

We are rarely "still" in nature. Visit a natural place that is conveniently available. Spend one hour in silence. Simply observe and be. Relaxing and opening.

Solo Walk

A group walks in silence as a form of "physical meditation". Helps to calm minds and set tone, providing an initial personal and group experience in the outdoors.

Hug-A-Tree
In a forested area, pairs take turns being blindfolded, lead to a tree (for touch and feel) and then lead away. After removing the blindfold, the tree hugger tries to locate his/her tree.

Eating Bugs
There is arguably no more intimate way of getting to know nature than by handling it with bare hands and even, yes, eating it. Most insects are edible and nutritious. Opening your mouth can open your mind.

Natural Orchestra
Create a musical performance using only natural materials.

Secret Smells
A guessing competition - use different smells from nature (e.g., flowers, leaves) - who can guess them right?

What if We Slept for 100 Years?
(A Rip van Winkle proposal for the restoration of nature)
If we slept for 100 years, what would the world look like and what would we do? Individuals or groups can dream, draw, write, act, discuss, etc. possible scenarios. Such activities help people to envisage new possibilities for more sustainable relations with nature.

Favorite Place in Nature
Where is your favorite place in nature? Write a description, draw or picture or describe the place to someone else. What makes it special?

Nature Scavenger Hunt
One way to run a nature scavenger hunt is to hand out an egg carton and a list of 12 items to collect - e.g., natural items which are: soft, spiky, blue, strong, beautiful, old, fragile, yummy, sharp, smooth, closed, open, wet, dry, from an animal, dead, etc. (be creative).

Leaf Rainbow
A nature art exercise: In small groups, students search for leaves of different shades and colors and create a "leaf rainbow".

Night Eyes
Go for a night walk without a flashlight (torch). At first, sit in one place and let your eyes adjust (10-15 minutes). You might be amazed how much you can see. As you walk, scan ahead by looking out the sides of your eyes – your night vision is even better in the periphery. If walking through the forest (bush), have your hands in front, protecting your face.

Observing the Micro-Universe

Peg out a 1 metre x 1 metre (3ft x 3ft) square in a patch of nature. Sit in the square for an hour, focusing only focus on what is inside the square. Observe the terrain and the myriad of natural dramas which are unfolding on the micro-scale.

Star therapy
Lay down under the night sky and watch the stars (or clouds in the daytime). An age-old, natural natural way of calming anxiety and dealing with depression.

What Has Changed in 150 Years?
What has changed in the last 150 years? Brainstorm as many things that have changed as you can. This is ideal for small groups – run it as a brainstorming competition. Ask groups to read their lists out to the whole group. Discuss the main themes, the surprises, etc.

Camping in the Backyard
Why do we spend all the time, fuel, energy, etc. going off for outdoor camping trips? Most of the benefits of camping (plus some extra ones) could be obtained by families sleeping in their backyards. (If you don't have a backyard, try the balcony, roof or a friend's or neighbor's place). Sleep in your backyard for at least a week each year. Cook on a fire (or a stove if fires aren't permitted), eat home-grown vegetables, don't watch TV or use power or the telephone. Stay on your property, but don't use the house. Really live in your backyard and get to know and care for it. It might change your life forever – and it will cost less than your normal, everyday life.

Conclusion

1. The era of Machines, electronic gaming and artificialism – Took the children away from real assence

of nature
2.Also bringing them closer to various disease, low physical stamina and decresed mental abilities
3.Our mission is to enrich the lives of all children by stimulating the appreciation of nature, exemplifying harmony between people, plants, gardens, and wildlife, and using the distinctive natural and cultivated habitats
4.By incorporating these Environmental educational activities & games in the curriculum of children's education system will provide them the opportunity to make sole to sole connection with nature in natural way.
5.This will increase their physical and mental abilities and off course they will also feel great responsibility towards nature

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