Supporting teachers in nature-based programs

Welcome!

Sarah Sivright
Director, All Seasons Preschool (Retired)

- Recently retired co-founder/director/art studio director/classroom teacher at All Seasons Preschool, a nature-based school with a multi-generational and art-focused program.
- Earned her B.A. in Studio Art from Carleton College and her Master's degree in Early Childhood Education from Erikson Institute in Chicago.
- Previous director and teacher at Dodge Nature Preschool in West St. Paul, MN.
- Over 30 years experience teaching and directing early childhood programs.

“If a child is to keep his inborn sense of wonder...he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in.” —Rachel Carson
Sheila Williams Ridge
Director, Shirley G. Moore Lab School

• B.S in Biology and M.A. in Education
• Co-author of Nature-Based Learning for Young Children
  (Stake, Assumption, and Education)
• Facilitator of the National Association for the
  Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Young Children
  and Nature Interest Forum
• Board member for Minneapolis Nature Preschool,
  Monarch Joint Venture, Voices & Choices for Children,
  Natural Start Alliance, Dodge Nature Center,
  Minnesota Parent Aware, and MNECO.

“Look deep into nature and then you will understand
everything better.” – Albert Einstein

Embrace Opportunities for Learning

• Encourage teachers to take risks
  and be creative
• Give it a try and allow room for
  failure
• Infuse equity
• Model risk-taking behavior – Ask
  what did we learn? What
  happened?

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Intentional Teaching

• Be ready to explain why
• Be curious
• Notice with children
Embracing wonder & joy!

Connecting with the classroom

Continuing to teach with young children
- Subbing
- Special classes
- Special camps
- Assisting with arrival & dismissal
Supporting Staff

- Time for preparation
- Implementation plans & areas for support
- Ongoing training & finding webinars
- Monthly staff meetings dedicating some time to talk about culture/education
- Don’t forget to talk about what’s going well.

What do we want to try next

- Teachers take time reporting and sharing & their reflection (ask questions, gather feedback)
- “Understand that staff are the most important resource you have and act like you believe it.” Powers
- Teacher self-evaluation

Teacher Self-Evaluation

- Teacher Self Evaluation - Spring/Spring (for teachers)
  1. Implement and integrate curriculum.
  2. ... based on those needs. Spend time observing children daily and have a system for recording.
Curriculum supported by nature-education

- DAP
- Emergent
- Child-led
- Discovery learning
- Social-constructivist
- More!
Experiential learning

Children who have frequent access to the outdoors “gain competence in moving through the larger world;” it also helps them to develop courage.

National Association for the Education of Young Children

Examples of models that can embrace nature:
- Reggio Inspired
- Project Approach
- Creative Curriculum
- Montessori
- Waldorf
Lesson Plans, Documentation, and Assessment

Math and Manipulatives
Materials: natural materials, environment
Manipulations: We have continued to engage in counting with the materials around us. On walk this week, children noticed various shapes around us: circular stones, triangular gravels, and even leaf shapes give us chances to talk about quantity and practice comparison terms.

Phonemic Awareness, Word Recognition, Vocabulary, Comprehension
Activities: Children have been enjoying many familiar books. They have also been using the new books that have been placed around the room. The children have been practicing writing their names and identifying letters in words.

Phenology
Phenology is the study of seasonal changes in nature. This time of year, we have noticed changes such as animals moving to warmer areas, plants shedding leaves, and the growth of new plants.

Phonemic awareness
Activities: Children have been enjoying many familiar books. They have also been using the new books that have been placed around the room. The children have been practicing writing their names and identifying letters in words.
Children are inspired by the natural world. As David Sobel, a well-known nature and play-based educator said, “Young children don’t want to observe animals, they want to be the animals.” This sequence shows a small group of children building a nest so they can be the birds, who create the nest, sit in the nest, and take care of their eggs.

BUILDING A NEST
Early Childhood/Infants of Progress:
Language, Literacy, and Communication
1.4.2.1.2 Communicates with others using gestures and vocalizations while playing and exploring;
1.4.2.1.3. Integrates a variety of art experiences during play;
1.4.2.1.4. Uses tools in new and novel ways.

All Seasons Preschool
Year End Developmental Summary

Child's Name:  
Class:        Date:  
Classroom Teacher:  ...

If you have any questions or concerns about this developmental summary, please contact your child’s teacher to schedule a meeting.
Training & Professional Development

Weather specific & Place-based curriculum training

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How Cold is Too Cold?

How Hot is Too Hot?
Help Teachers Be Prepared

- Extreme temperatures
- High Winds
- Smoke or pollution
- Fog
- Snow
- Sun & Sunscreen
- Frost
- Weather alerts for dangerous events: ex. Tornadoes or hurricanes
- Any poisonous or toxic substances or wildlife

Supporting Teachers with Resources for Proper Gear

Families

- Keeping parents and caregivers informed
- Tell families why
- Supplement with support and information
- Share resources
- Family friendly parks
- Transit to green space
Dear families

We wanted to let you know that if it is not too cold and there is no hail or lightning, we will take advantage of rain as a learning experience for your children. We can teach children scientific facts, but when they have first-hand experiences with nature, they can understand and remember those facts more easily.

What can children learn from playing in the rain?

The joy of nature. One of our goals is to engender a joy of nature in your children. Most children are drawn to puddles, and when they are allowed to play in the rain, they may learn to love, enjoy, and protect nature.

To navigate on slippery terrain. We work to build good motor skills in children in this program, including balance. The experience of playing outdoors in the rain helps children learn to test slippery paths before stepping on them, avoid deep puddles and take advantage of more shallow puddles, and keep their balance in different types of shoes.

To learn through their senses. You know that scent that tells you that rain is on its way? It provides a deep sense of pleasure for most of us. The sound of the rain against different surfaces, touch of splashes of different sizes and frequency, the taste of rain dripping into your mouth are all opportunities to awaken the senses.

To learn about rain through first-hand experience. If the only water you experience comes from a hose or faucet, you don’t know as much about water. Playing in the rain gives children an opportunity to learn about where the water we use comes from, that rain comes at different rates of intensity, wind affects the direction of rain, that water seeks its own level so puddles collect in holes and slanted ground, etc.

Excerpt from: Nature-Based Learning for Young Children (Powers & Williams Ridge, 2019)
Resources for Nature-Based Learning

Natural Start Professional Practice Guidebook
https://naturalstart.org/nature-based-preschool-professional-practice-guidebook

NAECE Early Childhood Environmental Education Guidelines for Excellence
https://naaee.org/mprr/resources/early-childhood-environmental-education

Redleaf Press
https://www.redleafpress.org/

MNECO (Minnesota Early Childhood Outdoors)
https://www.facebook.com/MIlEaryChildhoodOutdoorLearningNetwork/

Natural Start Alliance (National Conference for Nature-Based Early Childhood Educators)
https://naturalstart.org/

Four Seasons at a Nature-Based Preschool
https://www.dodgenaturecenter.org/preschool/about-us/preschool-publications

Teach Outdoors MN (K-12)
https://www.teachoutdoorsminnesota.com/workshops

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Children, It’s Spring by Mary Oliver

And this is the lady
Whom everyone loves,
Ms. Violet
In her purple gown

Or, on special occasions,
A dress the color
Of sunlight. She sits
In the mossy weeds and waits
To be noticed.
She loves dampness.
She loves attention.
She loves especially
To be picked by careful fingers,
Young fingers, entranced
By what has happened
To the world.

We, the elder ones,
Call in Spring.
And we have been through it
Many times.

But there is still something
Like the children bringing home
Such happiness,
In their small hands.

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