

Greening Our Planet Through Education: Using outdoor based learning experiences to foster a child's positive relationship with nature

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Introduction

"One must earn nature's gifts by *knowing* nature directly..."

- Elaine Brooks

Now, more than ever, opportunities for children to experience nature are growing increasingly more narrow. At the same time, these children are being taught to recycle, reduce their energy use and care for the broad concept of: 'the environment.' Unfortunately, without very many opportunities for them to learn about and experience nature, they can never build a true connection with what it is they are being instructed to protect. With the many global and local threats to our environment, it is of extreme importance that our society implement an effective strategy to teach our children about nature.

Environmental attachment theory- attachment to the land is good for both the person and the land
•Environmental education will benefit both the environment and the welfare of the child

Will implementing outdoor environmental education lessons in schools help to instill positive attitudes in children with regards to environmental stewardship?

Methods

- A series of environmentally focused lesson plans were developed
- The goal of these lesson plans were to teach young children about the natural sciences while using the natural environment as their classroom
- Various strategies were utilized in order to carry out this goal
- It is reasoned that, by introducing a child to nature in an educational setting, they will not only begin to *know* nature but also to respect it
- These lessons were carried out in an indoor and outdoor classroom setting on a once a week basis for a period of nine weeks. The children in these classes were ages 4-7. Observations of the children were recorded

Strategies for Teaching the Natural Sciences Using Outdoor Education



Hands on Experimental Learning

- Allow child to experience all five senses
- Child will gain experience in critical thinking and problem solving using trial-and-error learning strategies



An Indoor and an Outdoor Classroom

- Allows the educator to capture a child's attention while in an indoor setting where there is low sensory stimulation; followed by an active, highly stimulated outdoor discovery activity



Science and Art

- Using art and music to educate
- Allowing a child to form various connections with nature will help to generate a long lasting relationship of love and respect for the planet



Games and Challenges

- Evokes physical comfort in the outdoors
- Helps children gain self confidence

Results

Observations

Upon carrying out the lesson plans with the children:

- The children gained more self confidence both in the indoor and outdoor settings

- More readily answering and asking questions in the class
- Better able to socialize with peers
- Increased willingness and ability to share personal experiences with nature

- Children were able to safely utilize their senses to experience nature without receiving direct instruction to do so

Literature Review

Opportunities to come in connect with nature have been found to show improvements in a persons physical and mental well being

- Decrease incidences of childhood anxiety, depression and obesity
- Decreasing the symptoms of children with ADHD

Conclusions

Although environmental education in schools is a vital factor in establishing a society with a focus on environmental stewardship, it is in fact not the only component necessary.

Beyond the Classroom

If we are to expect the next generation to begin to carry out a good land ethic, other strategies must also be utilized, some of which include:

- Education must go beyond the classroom
 - Learning through ones family- parents and guardians set an example for their children by regularly sharing nature with them
- Green urban planning
 - A needed increase in green spaces available for children to play and learn within
 - Promotes a green way of living- a lifestyle dedicated to environmental stewardship

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