Greening Our Minds: Benefits of Nature for Health and Creativity

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What does the research tell us?
Nature-Deficit Disorder

“At the very moment that the bond is breaking between the young and the natural world, a growing body of research links our mental, physical, and spiritual health directly to our association with nature.”

-Richard Louv, author of “Last Child in the Woods”
More time inside, less time outside

- Estimated % of time today’s children spend indoors: 90%
- Average daily hours children aged 8-10 spend on TV, video games, & computers: 6-10 hours
- Children are becoming more obese, with more health problems
- Negative impacts on cognitive and conceptual development
Nature Benefits

- The more nature a child encounters at home – including exposure to indoor plants and window views of natural settings – the less he or she is affected by negative stresses.
- Exposure to nature results in profound differences in children’s attention capacities.
- Green spaces, including green schoolyards, enable children to think more clearly and cope more effectively with life stress.
Outdoor Experiences are Beneficial for Youth

- Access to green spaces for play enhances peace, self-control, and self-discipline among inner-city youth, especially among girls.
- Children who experience school grounds or play areas with diverse natural settings are more physically active, more aware of good nutrition, more creative, and more civil to one another.
- Outdoor experiences for teens result in enhanced self-esteem, self-confidence, independence, autonomy, and initiative with persistence of these traits through many years.
A sense of place describes the relationship between humans and their environment.

It includes the physical environment and the built environment, and the emotional attachment and feelings of belonging that humans have with those spaces.
Impacts on Child Development

- Experiences connecting young children to natural places are critical to healthy child development.
- Benefits include improvements in self-confidence, cognitive development, academic achievement, and emotional well-being.
- Even hearing sounds and smelling scents associated with nature affect mood, behavior, and cognition.
- Forest and nature schools are spreading from Europe into the United States.
- Forest and nature therapies are beginning to flourish for children and adults, including those suffering from trauma.
Impacts on the Environment

- A strong sense of place and connection with nature translates into positive environmental choices and behavior.
- It is therefore important for children to feel comfortable in the outdoors.
- If educators and policy makers provide more opportunities for children to connect with nature, future environmental stewardship will result.
- This also provides benefits for public health.
Designing Cities for Children

- The research discussed here is relevant for health and mental health professionals, urban planners, early childhood caregivers, educators, and families.

- Cities and schools must be designed with natural spaces and environmental programs for children a priority.

- Some actions that can be taken:
  - Writing prescriptions for outdoor play
  - Green schoolyards, gardens, and natural play areas in cities
  - New methods of teaching, including forest kindergartens
Outdoor Classroom Day is May 23!

- Schools all over the world will celebrate the benefits of outdoor learning by doing outdoor activities with their students
- Ideas for activities can be found at http://www.internationalschoolgrounds.org/isgm
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