



Greening Our Minds: Benefits of Nature for Health and Creativity

Shari L. Wilson
shari@projcentral.co

Borys Grinchenko
Kyiv University

Kyiv, Ukraine

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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.

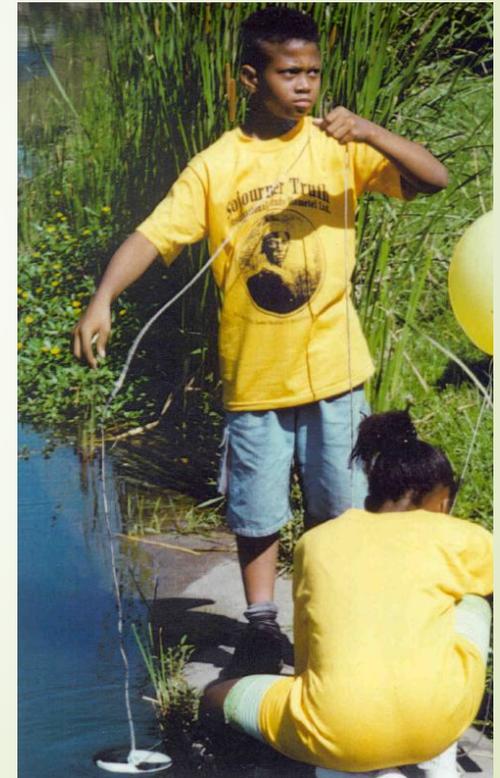
Connection to Nature and Sense of Place

- 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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Project Central

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