Wisdom From the North

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Belonging, Being and Becoming in Outdoor Environments
Surplus Safety

Richard Louv (2005) *Last Child in the Woods*

Parents are keeping children indoors in order to keep them safe from danger.

We may be protecting children to such an extent that it has become a problem and disrupts the child's ability to connect to nature...

With the advent of the computer, video games and television children have more and more reasons to stay inside, “The average American child spends 44 hours a week with electronic media”
Children have limited respect for their immediate natural surroundings. Louv says the effects on our children will be an even bigger problem in the future.

“An increasing pace in the last three decades, approximately, of a rapid disengagement between children and direct experiences in nature ... this has profound implications, not only for the health of future generations but for the health of the earth itself.”
Childhood obesity has become a growing problem. There have been multiple studies that show children who go outside more often exercise more.

Waller’s UK research using Child Involvement Scale (Leuven) indicated that children’s involvement and emotional wellbeing are notably higher in outdoor environments than inside the classroom.

Louv also argues that children who don't get nature-time seem more prone to anxiety, depression and attention-deficit problems.
Importance of active outdoor play is well documented (Bundy et al, 2008)

Excessive concern with safety is leading to a reduction in children’s outdoor play

Long term consequences for well-being (physical, emotional, spiritual)

Excessive measures taken by adults to make childhood ‘risk free’ jeopardises children’s freedom to play, explore and learn
Children learn to manage injuries like falls by being exposed to a range of surfaces, experiencing some injuries and making judgements about their movement on different surfaces, slopes etc.

The Royal Society for Prevention of Accidents notes “healthy play can result in injuries and this should be considered part of normal development for children of all abilities” (RSPoA website)

Children learn from experience of injury and risk and are often much better at making judgements about this than adults involved in their care expect. (Wyver, et al, 2010)
Outdoor Learning

- Nurturing a love and respect for the environment through repeated engagement with nature
- Spending time in natural places evokes a sense of belonging and invites children to play in special places of significance to them
- Exploring, creating, discovering, experiencing... the world
- Risk taking
“Outdoor learning spaces are a feature of Australian learning environments. They offer a vast array of possibilities not available indoors. Play spaces in natural environments include plants, trees, edible gardens, sand, rocks, mud, water and other elements from nature. These spaces invite open-ended interactions, spontaneity, risk-taking, exploration, discovery and connection with nature...they promote opportunities for sustained shared thinking and collaborative learning” (EYLF, 2009, pp. 15-16)
“Natural (wild) outdoor environments can be developed as appropriate ‘children’s spaces’ because within the space, activities and culture are created by the children themselves. In these ‘children’s spaces’ pedagogy and research take on different forms as children and adults co-construct knowledge together, enjoying and learning from, and with the outdoor environment.” (Waller, 2007, p. 404)
What is happening in the rest of the world?

• In the past five years a rapid increase in ‘outdoor kindergartens’ in Scandinavia, Europe and the UK.

• Why is this occurring?
“The teacher has to dare to open themselves to the unexpected and to experiment with children” (Dahlberg, 2010)

Project work in Nature
A process of experimentation and research with children in which both teacher and child identify problems before they search for solutions together.
“if you are not allowed to invent your questions,
if people pour them into you,
then you haven’t much to say”

Deleuze
• Outcome 2 Children are connected with and contribute to their world
  – *Children become socially responsible and show respect for the environment*

*Educators promote this learning when they*
  – *provide children with access to a range of natural materials in their environment;*
  – *consider the nature of children’s connectedness to the land;*
  – *Find ways of enabling children to care for and learn from the land*
Children are confident and involved learners

- Dispositions such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination, reflexivity.
- Problem solving, inquiry, experimentation, hypothesising, researching and investigating.
Outdoor learning in Norway
EYLF connections

• Outcome 4 Children are confident and involved learners

  Children resource their own learning through connecting with people, place, technologies and natural and processed materials

Educators promote this learning when they:

— Provide experiences that involve children in the broader community and environment beyond the early childhood setting;

— Introduce appropriate tools, technologies and media and provide skills knowledge and techniques to enhance children’s learning;
Professional Culture of Early Childhood Education in Sweden
Mobile Forest Kindergartens

Morning Meeting Place
sharp knives
young children
Child designed and built: nesting areas for birds and bugs
WISE EYES Reflect

What questions have arisen today:
For you?
For our profession?
For the children and families we work with?
For policy makers?
Thank you