

Supporting teachers in nature-based programs



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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.
- She received her B.A. in Studio Art from Carleton College and 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

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Sheila Williams Ridge
Director, Shirley G. Moore Lab School

- BA in Biology and M.A. in Education
- Co-author of *Nature-Based Learning for Young Children: Anytime, Anywhere, on Any Budget*
- 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

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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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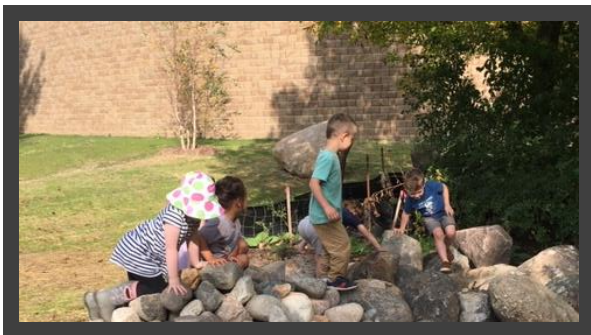
Intentional Teaching

- Be ready to explain why
- Be curious
- Notice with children

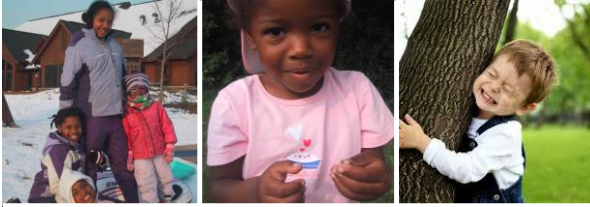
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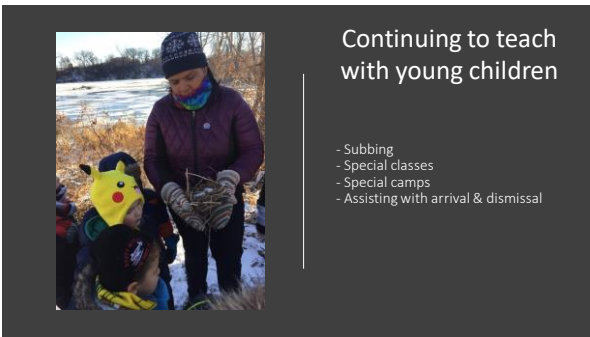
Embracing wonder & joy!

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Connecting with the classroom

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Continuing to teach with young children

- Subbing
- Special classes
- Special camps
- Assisting with arrival & dismissal

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Supporting Staff

- Time for preparation
- Implementation plans & areas for support
- Inservice training & finding webinars
- Monthly staff meetings dedicating some time to talk about nature-education
- Don't forget to talk about what's going well

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Supporting Staff

- 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](#)

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Teacher Self-Evaluation

Teacher Self-Evaluation - Fall/Spring (for Teachers)

I. Support and improve instruction.

Use an annual evaluation and discussion, a single topic or different areas of instructional focus (e.g., standards, content, assessment, data, or student learning) to evaluate and improve instruction. Consider the needs of the children to provide feedback and determine, using data or other tools, a plan for improvement.

Self
 Areas of strength:
 Areas for growth:

Using
 Strategies:

II. Maintain an effective, technical and social learning environment. *Set up the classroom and the school to provide an environment that supports the highest level of instruction. Change the environment to keep it on high.*

Self
 Areas of strength:
 Areas for growth:

Using
 Strategies:

III. Track the development of the individual children, assess needs, and plan based on those needs. *Track the learning children study and have a system for recording*

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Curriculum supported by nature-education

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

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Developmentally Appropriate Practices



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Emergent Curriculum

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Discovery-based learning



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Experiential learning

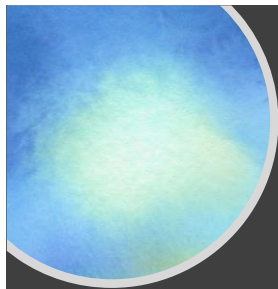
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Children who have frequent access to the outdoors “gain competence in moving through the larger world;” it also helps them to develop courage.

National Association for the Education of Young Children

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Examples of models that can embrace nature



Reggio Inspired



Project Approach



Creative Curriculum



Montessori



Waldorf

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Lesson Plans,
Documentation,
and Assessment

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Math and Manipulatives

- Materials: natural materials, environment
- Rationale: We have continued to engage in counting with the materials around us. On walks this week, children noticed many shapes around us - circular vents, triangular sculptures, and more. Leaf piles gave us chances to talk about quantity and practice comparison terms.
- Skills: counting, number recognition, cardinality, comparing numbers, one to one correspondence and whole/part relationships, fine motor development, planning

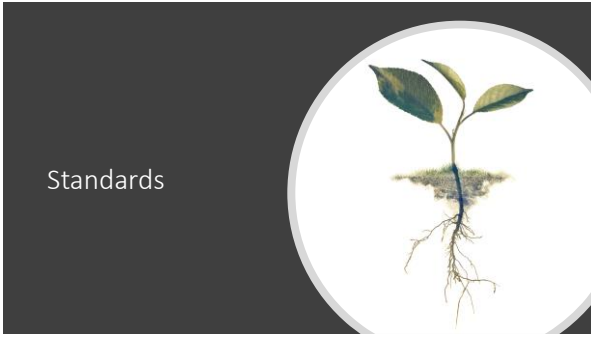
Language and Literacy

- Materials: nature themed books, familiar books, markers, paper, environmental text
- Rationale: Children have been enjoying many familiar books. They have also been pointing out words that they find on the playground, on our walks, and even on backpacks! Many children have also been practicing writing their name and identifying letters in words.
- Skills: Letter recognition, listening and receptive abilities, fine motor control, familiarity with symbol systems, story telling, memory, information recall, letter sounds, concepts of print

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Phenology

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Standards

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Top Right Video: OM and F discuss how to break the ice and navigate sharing the stick.
 Bottom Right: K jumps into the snow!
 Center: OM, A, and F climb a snow hill.



Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: Language, Literacy, and Communication:
 L4.12 Actively participates in reading activities with enjoyment and purpose

Arts: A1.5 Integrates a variety of art experiences during play

Scientific Thinking: ST.12 Uses tools in new and novel ways

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**All Seasons Preschool
 Year End Developmental Summary**

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

Social-Emotional Development
 Young children are developing self-regulation, empathy, coping skills, and ways of expressing emotions. Children are learning the social skills necessary to interact with adults and peers individually, as well as within a group. All forms of play (solitary, parallel, associative and cooperative) are valued as part of the social development process.

Adjustment to Classroom (Growth from Fall)
 Self-Regulation (regulating emotions, self-confidence, decision making, etc.)
 Social Interaction (interacting positively, including names, identifying emotions, conversation)
 Self-Play (playing independently, including names, identifying emotions, conversation)
 Play: What matters to each child (play themes, interests and activities)

Physical Development and Approach to Outdoor Experiences
 Children are becoming confident, resilient, and comfortable in doing more activities alone with few more development to support tasks, play with more manipulation, the use of writing and drawing materials, and a variety of materials and tools.

Large Motor
 Fine Motor
 Coordination - manual
 Confidence in activities
 Approach (interest, visual feedback)

Cognitive Development
 Research suggests children develop their cognitive abilities in various ways. Exposure to a wide variety of experiences allows children to learn about their world. They develop skills for language acquisition and the represent an experiential analysis, or describe others.

Language and Literacy Skills
 Interest in reading and writing (signs in large or writing)
 Letter and sound recognition
 Narrative (storytelling, with facts)
 Storytelling (experiences, ideas, and emotions, story patterns and story writing)
 Creative (experiences, ideas, and emotions, story patterns and story writing)

This report was written by _____ at All Seasons Preschool. If you would like the opportunity to further discuss this developmental summary, please contact your child's teacher at a scheduled meeting.



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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

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Supporting Teachers with Resources for Proper Gear

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Families

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

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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.

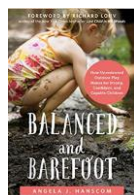
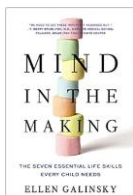
To navigate on slippery terrain. We work to build good motor skills in children in this program, including balance. The experience of playing outdoors in the rain helps children learn to test slippery paths before stepping on them, avoid deep puddles and take advantage of more shallow puddles, and keep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

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Resources

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Resources for Nature-Based Learning

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

NAAEE Early Childhood Environmental Education Guidelines for Excellence
<https://naaee.org/eepro/resources/early-childhood-environmental-education>

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

MNECO (Minnesota Early Childhood Outdoors)
<https://www.facebook.com/MNEarlyChildhoodOutdoorLearningNetwork/>

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 older ones,
Call in Spring,
And we have been through it
Many times.

But there is still nothing
Like the children bringing home
Such happiness
in their small hands.



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