Background

Children have limited access to nature due to:
- Nature degradation
- Urbanization
- Technology

• Children's overall mental and physical health is declining due to lack of nature.
• But there are limited opportunities for children to explore nature at home.
• Therefore, we must create equal opportunity for children to safely explore nature by integrating it into schools.

Research Question

• How can we help children rebuild a connection to nature despite barriers?

Internship & Methods

• Oxbow Farm & Conservation Center is a nonprofit teaching outdoor education, focusing on exploration in nature and food systems.
• I partnered with Oxbow to plan and propose a sensory garden for a local elementary school.

Meetings: What would the community benefit from?

Project Proposal: Written proposal to send to the school district.

Research: What is proven to engage children in nature?

Installation: Building features that can be installed into the garden space.

Findings

• During my internship I talked to parents, staff, and students, all of whom made it clear that there was a need for more outdoor learning spaces.
• To help children rebuild their connection to nature we will need to make nature accessible and safe to every child.
• Therefore we must implement nature curriculums into school settings by using:
  • Garden programs
    • Gardening not only is a great way to get outdoors but it also teaches responsibility and creates a multi-sensory experience.
  • Nature language integration
    • “Turn right past the lavender bush, then left after the second aspen tree.” By speaking this way to children it will foster exploration in nature (Kahn, 2018).
  • Outdoor classroom learning programs
    • It has been proven that a one hour weekly outdoor program can have significant improvements in children’s mood, and wellbeing (Harvey, 2020).

Next Steps

1. Outdoor education curriculum: Incorporate nature exploration in preexisting core curriculum.
   • Ex) learn to measure using nature on school grounds. How many inches is this leaf?
2. Train staff: Give teachers tools to learn how to teach outdoor education.
   • How can teachers creatively teach their material in nature?
3. Funding: Make nature accessible to all schools by creating nature spaces.

Figure 3: I have learned how enjoyable simple aspects of nature can be. The figure above shows students at Oxbow Farm exploring soil. Below is a quote from a student I worked with at Frank Wagner Elementary School exploring sand. This goes to show that simple can be effective.

“Let’s go stick our hands in the sand!!” - 2nd grade student exclaims as they walked from play structure to check out sensory stations.

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