**Context and Background**
- Socio-emotional skills & development are key for creating a well-rounded child and adult.
- Having connections to the local environmental and natural surroundings is essential to helping maintain healthy local ecosystems.
- Lack of outdoors is creating challenges with social development and environmental attitudes and is ultimately leading to Nature Deficit Disorder.
- To face this growing divide between children and nature, we must find solutions, like forest schools, to help reduce these social and environmental gaps (see Fig 1).

**Research Question**
**How do forest schools, and being in an outdoor environment help to positively aid students?**

**Internship and Methods**
- Interned at Fiddleheads Forest School, an outdoor preschool in the arboretum.
- Created an arboretum-focused field guide for the teachers and students.
- Conducted observations of 4-5 preschool students per summer session (see Fig 2).

**Figure 2:** This chart displays a sample of how I collected my observational data. The top row displayed the subject, date, location of occurrence, productive tension (have positive conflict resolution), collaboration (how students work with one another), and interactions with nature (how students connect to nature and their natural surroundings). The rows below, on the other hand, represent the individual subject (students) data.

**Figure 1:** Children within the Magnolia classroom at Fiddleheads Forest School play with one another within the class’s wooden obstacle course.

**Productive Tensions:**
The freedom and flexibility of forest school provide students with space to gain independence, which helps each of them develop their own voice and emotions.

EX: When playing in the Mud Kitchen, student H got sprayed with water and was upset. Rather than lashing out, H simply stood up, shook it off, and used his voice to state that “I do not like that, but I’ll be okay, it’ll dry off” all without the assistance of an adult.

Nature is a calming place, which can help students remain levelheaded, which prevents a lot of conflicts.

**Collaboration:**
Small classes help create a stronger community structure, which pushes children to create relationships with those around them.

Limited supplies are given to children, yet many of the students want to work with the same objects. This forces the students to work together while also sharing.

EX: Students A & B both wanted to use the same net to capture bugs but there was only one, so they worked together to search for bugs.

**Interaction with Nature:**
Few artificial toys and goods are provided to students, which gets them to think outside the box and get creative with what is in nature.

Seeing different flora and fauna in their local environment with their own eyes helps to strengthen the children’s relationships and makes them care.

EX: In class one day, an owl had flown into the classroom. The students were filled with excitement and for the rest of the day, all they wanted to talk and learn about were owls and their habitats.

**Broader Implications**
- Incorporating nature exploration and outdoor education in the preexisting core curriculum at schools & training teachers and even parents on how to utilize the outdoors as a teaching and learning tool would be incredibly beneficial.
- Furthering research on the positive effects of outdoor and environmental education on children’s development.

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