Video Background

Link to film:
Nature Seekers: Nature-based Environmental Education of Children and Shaping Their Relationship with the Environment

Today’s generations are becoming more and more disconnected from nature in our increasingly urbanized world. This disconnect is known as “extinction of experience” and is considered to be a major public health issue and has contributed to increasing biodiversity loss (Pyle, 1978, Pyle, 1993). Children today play outside less frequently and for briefer amounts of time. “Nature Deficit Disorder” is defined as the phenomenon that disconnection with the natural world leads to changes in children’s quality of life (Louv, 2005). Children are facing health issues such as obesity, ADD, ADHD, vitamin D deficiency, cognitive and attitude problems as well as suppressed language and cognitive development that results from staying inside and looking at television screens or other electronic devices for long periods of time (Jusoff, 2009).

These childhood health issues can carry over into adulthood as well. Spending time outside has scientific health benefits in adults. Some of these benefits include improved short term memory, restored mental energy, stress relief, reduced inflammation, better vision, improved concentration, sharper thinking and creativity and an immune system boost. Connection with nature also has self-awareness benefits as well. One study, involving over 400 youths who were surveyed and interviewed, showed that the majority of participants felt an increase sense of personal autonomy, improved self-concept, improved action and decision making, and an improvement in their interpersonal skills after attending a wilderness-based program (Faber Taylor & Kuo, 2006, 126). Another study showed that children who have more nature near their home are less likely to have behavioral conduct disorders, anxiety and depression compared to children who do not live near much nature (Wells & Evans, 2000, 130). This increased self-esteem and gratification improves children's connection with nature and forms an emotional bond that leads to pro-environmental behavior (Cheng and Monroe, 2012; Collado et al., 2013; Hinds and Sparks, 2008, Müller et al., 2009).

Experience in nature helps children create a positive relationship and connection to nature and peaks interest in participating in nature-based activities and ecological behaviors (Cheng & Monroe, 2010). Multiple studies support the theory that children are sensitive to the environment and positive experiences with nature promote pro-environmental attitudes, such as using both sides of a sheet of paper (Cheng & Monroe, 2012; Evans et al., 2007). Evidence shows that children who participate in environmental education programs have positive views on and willingness to perform ecological behaviors, environmental attitudes and environmental knowledge (Evans et al., 2007, Ernst & Theimer, 2011, Powers, 2004). Appendix A below is a chart showing the relationship between frequency of contact with nature and environmental attitudes and behaviors (Collado, Staats & Corraliza, 2013).

Kellert and Wilson came up with the Biophilia Hypothesis, which states, “humans have an innate affinity for nature and need nature for aesthetics, intellectual, cognitive and spiritual meaning,” (Kellert & Wilson, 1993). Children experience nature through consistent experience and play, which stimulates their senses and improves cognitive development. Children experience nature in three ways: direct contact, indirect contact, and vicarious experience. Direct contact involves hands on exploration and play in a green space without human restriction or control (Freeman & Tranter, 2011; Kellert, 2002). Indirect contact is experience in an organized environment such as zoos, nature museums and gardens (Freeman & Tranter, 2011; Kellert, 2002). Vicarious experience occurs through visual or verbal interactions with the absence of physical contact. This type of experience can be seen in classroom learning, books and videos (Kellert, 2002).

The desire to connect future generations to nature in hopes for creating positive relationships with the environment is the reason I did my video topic on the nature based program called Nature Seekers. Nature Seekers is an early childhood discovery center whose mission is to provide a natural environment where children will grow physically, socially, emotionally and academically. At this program Nature is the teacher and the instructors are the facilitators, helping children connect with nature, themselves and others.

For my research, I wanted to know what environmental aspects and ecological behaviors do the children take away from the Nature Seekers program and how are the instructors’ methods facilitating these behaviors? In relation to anthropology, I wanted my research to be a study of the relationship between a group of children and their biophysical environment. I went to the facility on a few occasions and spent the day observing the goings on while collecting film. I also went with the instructors to a town fair, where they had a booth set up with multiple activities to do and crafts to make. Here I practiced participation observation by interacting with the children and making crafts with them.

In my film, I incorporated both video clips and pictures. I included an interview with the instructors and I also sent out a survey to the children’s parents (Appendix B). Appendix C is a survey from a study I read about and I used this survey as a reference when coming up with questions for my survey (Gunderson, O'Brien, Weld & Follo, 2016). I chose to include a small amount of narration in my film because I think it is important to making it completely clear to the viewers what is happening. However, I did not want to narrate too much because I wanted the voices of the instructors to be heard. Sherman states in Projecting the Self that when she interviewed a handful of filmmakers, most of them agreed that the people appearing in the film should dominate it (Sherman 1998), and that is what I was trying to do in my film.

Appendix A: The relationship between frequency of contact with nature and environmental attitudes and behaviors (Collado, Staats & Corraliza, 2013).
Appendix B: My survey.

1. Your child is excited to go to Nature Seekers each day
   Strongly Agree   Agree   Neither   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

2. While at home your child talks about what they do and learn at Nature Seekers
   Everyday   Most Days   Sometimes   Very Little   Never

3. Would you say your child is enthusiastic about learning about nature?
   Strongly Agree   Agree   Neither   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

4. Do you see your child applying what they learn at Nature Seekers to things they do at home?
   Yes   No

   If so, can you give an example?____________________________________________________________

5. About how much time at home does your child spend outside each day?
   60 min. or more   30-60 min.   15-30 min.   15 min or less

6. Outside of Nature Seekers, has your child showed you plants and/or animals and identified them or talked to you about what they know about that plant or animal?
   Yes, more than once   Yes, one time   No

   If so, could you list what plant/animal as well as what your child said about it?
   __________________________________________________________________________

Appendix C: Reference survey (Gunderson, Obrien, Wold & Follo, 2016).

How would you evaluate the children’s possibilities to be outside in nature and other green areas nearby home? (n=153)
   Good and very good: 88%
   Much and very much: 86%
   Good and very good: 85%
   Much more and very much: 85%
   Much and very much: 71%
   Important and very important: 69%

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