Miraglia, Abby - Nature-Based Environmental Education of Children
Research Proposal

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. One study shows that “increased participation in nature-based environmental education was related to greater ecological behaviour, mediated by increases in environmental knowledge and connectedness to nature” (Otto: 2017: 1) The instructors encourage and demonstrate ecological behaviors that the children hopefully learn to follow as well. Joelene Hughes states in her journal article, Evaluating Connection to Nature and the Relationship with Conservation Behaviour in Children, that “a connection to nature may be developed through repeated engagement with nature, and experiences during childhood are thought to be particularly significant” (Hughes: 2018: 1). Since children learn the most at a young age when their brains are still developing, repeated exposure to and positive experiences with nature will influence more ecological and conservation behaviors in their futures.

Heider defines ethnography as “a way of making a detailed description and analysis of human behavior based on long term observational study” (Heider: 1976: 6). My “making change” ethnographic film will be focused on a preschool teacher who has drifted away from the standard ways of teaching and is now doing more nature-based environmental education. With permission from the program instructor, I will go to the newly renovated building and collect film that is related to and supports my research question: 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? There are essentially two parts to my question that I will have to cover: the goals of the instructors and the response of the children. I will be interviewing the instructor(s), asking a series of questions that will let them explain their methods and goals. I might also have the children’s parents take a survey to figure out if the children are applying what they learn in the program to things that they do at home. I will also practice participation observation and regular observation when collecting film and research for my study.

Scholarly/Peer Reviewed

Heider, Karl R.
1976, Chapter 1: Introduction. Ethnographic Film, pp. 1-15 University of Texas Press, Austin

Otto, Siegmar, and Pamela Pensini
2017 Nature-based environmental education of children: Environmental knowledge and connectedness to nature, together, are related to ecological behaviour. Global Environmental Change 47: 88–94

Hughes, Joelene, Miles Richardson, and Ryan Lumber

Final Video

Scholarly Background

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 et al. 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: direct quotes require page numbers). 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, Obrion, Wold & 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. Excellent work, rubric below

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).

References Cited

Scholarly/Peer Reviewed

Collado, Silvia, Henk Staats, and José A. Corraliza

Collado, Silvia, José A. Corraliza, Henk Staats, and Miguel Ruiz

Gundersen, V., M. Skår, L. O'brien, L.c. Wold, and G. Follo

Hughes, Joelene, Miles Richardson, and Ryan Lumber

Lindgren, Carl

Mustapa, Nor Diyana, Nor Zarifah Malik, and Aswati Hamzah

Otto, Siegmar, and Pamela Pensini
Sherman, Sharon R.

Soga, Masashi, Takahiro Yamanoi, Kazuaki Tsuchiya, Tomoyo F. Koyanagi, and Tadashi Kanai
2018 What are the drivers of and barriers to children’s direct experiences of nature?. Landscape and Urban Planning 180: 114–120.

Taylor, Andrea Faber, and Frances E. Kuo

Wawrzyk, Ana, and Bibiana Vilá
2013 Children’s Values and Attitudes About the Wild Vicuña (Vicugna vicugna) in Andean Argentina. Journal of Ecological Anthropology 16 (1).

Popular
Loria, Lauren F Friedman Kevin
2016 11 scientific reasons you should be spending more time outside. Business Insider. Business Insider, April 22

Approximately 900 words
Yes  no

Provides basic background information for the issues
Outstanding  Strong  Adequate  Weak

Substantial list of scholarly and peer-reviewed References Cited listed
Outstanding  Strong  Adequate  Weak

Includes brief discussion of why you chose the format of your video (e.g., narrated or non-narrated, etc) in relation to the course readings.
Outstanding  Strong  Adequate  Weak

Makes reference to any of the films we watched that inspired your approach to the film. If so, why?
Yes  no

The final wiki space is in past tense
Yes  no

References in American Antiquity format.
Yes  no  very minor problems, did not affect grade

Reflection on Video
Reflecting back on my original proposal, my goal was to capture how the instructors of Nature Seekers are making change in children’s relationships with their biophysical environment. Two parts of this goal that I wanted to focus on were the instructors methods and the response of the children. I planned on interviewing the instructors and I was also contemplating sending out a survey to the parents.

I did everything that I said I was going to do and I believe that I achieved my goal. I interviewed the instructors, which I think was very helpful in my video because it allowed them to have a major voice and express their methods and goals of the nature center. One thing that I would do different is come up with questions that were more anthropological (good) and encouraged the interviewees to answer more anthropologically. I’m afraid that the questions that I asked caused the film to be more educational and less anthropological than I intended. However, I could not have asked the instructors to answer the questions that I asked any better. The responses were clear and coherent and really showed the instructors passion and enthusiasm towards nature-based teaching/learning. I did end up sending out a survey to the parents of the children. I think this was a good choice because it helped me see how the children are reacting to Nature Seekers. Also, since I could not include children in my film, I decided to include parent quotes from those surveys to show the audience what the children are taking away from this program.

I believe that my written component ties well to my video. Heider believed that a thorough understanding of the subject must be achieved before filming begins (Heider 1976) and my background research and written component really helped me understand my topic and do a better job when collecting film. The written part gives a background of nature-based learning and the benefits it has on children. I was able to include ideas and concepts that I did not have time to put in my video. I also think that my written component helps my overall topic become more anthropological and less educational.

At the time I wrote my original proposal, I did not know if I wanted to include my voice in the video. I wanted the voices of my interviewees to dominate the film and I got this inspiration from the interviews that Sherman had with multiple filmmakers in her work Projecting the Self (Sherman 1998). However, I decided to incorporate a small amount of my voice in my film and I am glad I did so because I think it helped the audience understand what was happening. I also think it helped my film appear more anthropological because I included statements that indirectly laid out my goals and intentions for the audience. I don’t think that my voice was prevalent enough to have the “voice of God” effect that is mentioned by many of the authors we read.

Overall, I am proud of my work and I believe it turned out better than I expected. I was able to research a topic that I am passionate about and make a ten minute video about it. I was actually somewhat disappointed that we were limited to ten minutes because I had more footage that I would liked to have included. I ran into some difficulties when putting all the footage together, but I got through it with some time and patience. Obviously there is always room for improvement, but I am happy with the end result of my work.

References Cited

Heider, Karl R.

1976, Chapter 1: Introduction. Ethnographic Film, pp. 1-15 University of Texas Press, Austin

Sherman, Sharon R.


Written Reflection on Final Video Rubric (see syllabus p 3-4)

Evaluates your video in relation to your written wiki space and the course readings, with explicit references to both.

Outstanding Strong Adequate Weak

Discusses choices you made about the style of the video and evaluates how successful were they in conveying the subject matter.

Outstanding Strong Adequate Weak

Discusses how well the video worked in comparison to the written component?

Outstanding Strong Adequate Weak
Explicitly reference the course readings (and other resources if you wish).

Outstanding  Strong  Adequate  Weak

Entry is in past tense.

Yes  No