OF LAND & LIVING SKIES: A Community Journal on Place, Land, and Learning is a partnership between SaskOutdoors, the Sustainability Education Research Institute (SERI) with the University of Saskatchewan’s College of Education, and the Faculty of Education at the University of Regina. Of Land & Living Skies is a community journal where theory and practice merge, becoming a space for dialogue within the fields of environmental and sustainability education, and focusing on research, policy, and community practices, as well as inspiring action.

COVER IMAGE ARTIST: Nichole Huck

Nichole Huck - Nichole Huck and her husband Shawn live on Treaty 4 territory in Regina with their three little kids. When she’s not parenting she is a journalist at CBC Saskatchewan, a dancer, a bicyclist, a traveller, and an enthusiastic beginner ukulele player.

Thank you to this issue's funders:

OF LAND & LIVING SKIES

NEXT ISSUES

Urban Environmental Education
Published Summer 2018. Submissions due March 2018

www.landandlivingskies.ca for the Call for Submissions for our future issues

Editor: Karen McIver
Inquiries: oflandandlivingskies@gmail.com
Advisory editors: Merrissa Karmark, Marcia McKenzie, Rachel Regier, Valerie Triggs
 Publishers: SaskOutdoors
Design and Layout: Tania Walk, GoGiraffeGo
Printed on 100% Recycled Paper

ENVISeGe
1. to form a mental image of; visualize; contemplate
2. to conceive of as a possibility in the future; foresee

Eco-literacy in the Early Years

BY KAREN MCIVER

This issue of the journal is meant to highlight the importance of fostering Environmental educational experiences and environmental literacy in the early years. This can happen in many ways and we have done our best in this issue to highlight some of the many ways children can be centered when it comes to environmental learning. During my recent camping trip to Cypress Hills inter-Provincial Park with my two young sons, I took a moment to flip through the Canadian Journal for Environmental Education (CJEE) Volume 20 (2015). In that issue, a paper written by Clare Nugent and Simon Beaumes titled Cultural Transmission at Nature Kindergartens: Foraging as a Key Ingredient brought to light a few areas of research that link up well with our current issue of Of Land & Living Skies: A Community Journal on Place, Land, and Learning. For example, their article about Nature Kindergartens and foraging states that, “Preschool has been recognized as an important stage in the shaping of beliefs such as environmental attitudes (Bailie, 2000)” (p.79).

In this issue, Anna Rose writes about the pedagogy she uses in Regina’s only Nature Kindergarten program in Prairie Sky School. The Place Practice article is beautifully displayed with many photos to get a sense of what the young five year olds experience in a year of schooling. Nugent and Beaumes (2015) explain that, “Nature Kindergartens are appearing throughout Scotland, United States, Australia, Canada, and countries in Northern Europe” (p. 80). Nature Kindergartens are founded on a belief that learning in natural settings offers unique benefits to kids in their formative years (Anggard, 2009).

Vadala, Bixler, and James (2007) did a study that showed the many positive influences that direct experience with local nature in childhood can exert on environmental interests in adulthood (as cited in Nugent & Beaumes, 2015). This study aligns nicely with our Research from the Field articles written by Dr. Janet McVittie and her students in a graduate class called “Learning in Nearby Nature”. McVittie challenged students to teach a series of lessons in their practices related to Nearby Nature and to reflect on that for their final papers.

Related to the concept of nearby nature, our Community Traces article titled Results Based Conservation Agreements Encourage Species at Risk and Ranching by Tracy Harrison, Orit Balas, and Ross Macdonald is about how ranchers are coming together to focus on conservation and Species at Risk. Nugent & Beaumes (2015) make sure to note that “Any inquiry into early childhood practice calls into consideration the perceptions, attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviours of the adults who surround the developing child” (p. 81). Our ‘This is My Place article by Nichole Huck, our Family Experience article by Jeff Moore and Jared Clarke, and our Dialogue interview with Jana Miller highlight how the influences of parents and grandparents in the lives of young people can foster a deeper connection to outdoor recreation and specific nature places.

Huck describes the relationship between the first organ that ever nourished a child to the child’s connection to a specific piece of land (p.32). She writes about the intentional act that she and her husband did to create a strong sense of place for their children to the special places that they felt connected to. Clarke and Moore provide us with a story and tips on how to get young families out on canoe trips and reconnect their personal journey with each of their sets of twins on the Missouri River in Montana. And lastly, Miller discusses what the Nature Grandparenting program is in Saskatoon and why it is significant to children and grandparents alike.

Curriculum Brought to Life is the writing of the lead educator at the Ottawa Nature and Forest School. She shares with us the concept of emergent curriculum and how that can support early learners. Our Poetry section is really interesting this time. It is a series of poems that were written by the same author in one place at different times of the year.

As the University of Toronto’s Environmental and Sustainability Education webpage states: “when young children learn about being responsible stewards to their environment, it can increase the likelihood that they will be more environmentally conscious throughout their lives. The rationale for environmental education in the early years is also that positive interactions with the natural environment are part of healthy child development.” Environmental Education in the Early Years should take on a play-based approach to learning and we hope that the articles in this issue can give you some good ideas in your teaching or parenting/grandparenting practices.

Work cited


University of Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. “Early Years and ESE” http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/ese/Key_Resources/Subject-based_Info/Kindergarten.html


SUMMER 2017

OF LAND & LIVING SKIES 1
CONTRIBUTORS

Anna Rose is a lover of art, community and nature. When not out working in her family gardens, creating art, hosting clothing swaps and potlucks, or playing with her own three children, she enjoys teaching Kindergarten at Regina’s Prairie Sky School. She loves to bring ritual and reverence to the changing of the seasons, and celebrate the rhythms of the day, week and months both in the kindergarten and beyond.

Aaron Warner, teacher in Regina Public School division, completed a #100DaysOfCre project last year with his Grade 7 and 8 students inspired by author Neal McLeod. McLeod is author of the book 100 Days of Cree, published by University of Regina Press and nominated for a 2017 Saskatchewan Book Award. “Based on a series of Facebook posts, the 100 short chapters or “days” in the book present a chain of related words, some dealing with the traditional—the buffalo hunt, the seasons—and others cheekily capturing the detritus of modern life—from Internet slang to Johnny Cash songs” (uofrpress.ca).

Nicole Huck and her husband Shawn live on Treaty 4 territory in Regina with their three little kids. When she’s not parenting she is a journalist at CBC Saskatchewan, a dancer, a bicycler, a traveller, and enthusiastic beginner ukulele player.

Jana Miller grew up on a farm South of Prince Albert where she took pride in maintaining foot trails, building forts and helping grow food on her parents’ farm. She has taught a grade 8 Ecoquest program with Saskatoon Public Schools and has recently started Wildernook Fresh Air Learning, a social purpose business, which uses creative entrepreneurship to engage groups of people on the environmental education sidelines.

Janet McVittie is an Assistant Professor at the University of Saskatchewan in the Department of Educational Foundations. She has worked on numerous outdoor and environmental education initiatives including the Prairie Habitat Garden and the Western Red Lily Centennial Project. She has also done research on integrated outdoor education programs in Saskatoon.

Jeff Moore & Jared Clarke - Jeff Moore is a SaskOutdoors board member, a Paddle Canada instructor and one of the leaders of the Greenall Outdoor School program. Jared Clark is a grade 6/7 teacher in Regina and is the host of the radio show The Prairie Naturalist.

Jordan Wolff growing raised on a farm in Saskatchewan, I developed an appreciation for nature at an early age. I was home-schooled until grade 10 and allowed many opportunities to explore the land. I am currently entering my 4th year of study with the College of Education at the U of S with a major in mathematics. At this same time I am preparing to take my ATCL with the Trinity College of London and plan to become a registered music teacher in 2018.

Sonja Lukassen is a lead educator at Ottawa Forest and Nature School, Sonja believes that we learn best when we are able to make choices, express our uniqueness, work together in an authentic way, and be outside in all sorts of weather.

The South of the Divide Conservation Action Program Inc. (SODCAP Inc.) is a partnership between stakeholders and government with a goal of implementing actions relating to the South of the Divide Multi-Species Action Plan. We have representatives from the Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association, The Saskatchewan Cattlemen’s Association, Crescent Point Energy, the Ranchers Stewardship Alliance, SaskPower, the Nature Conservancy of Canada, and the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, as well as Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment and Environment Canada.

CONTENTS

FEATURES

PLACE PRACTICE
6 NATURE PLAY AND EXPLORATION IN THE STARTLowers KINDERGARTEN AT PRARIE SKY SCHOOL
BY ANNA ROSE
A profile of Regina’s only Nature Kindergarten

RESEARCH FROM THE FIELD
11 LEARNING IN NEARBY NATURE
DR. JANET MCVITIE, UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN AND STUDENTS AARON KNUDSEN, ANDREW KITCHEN, RACHEL REGIER AND KILENE GREEN
Graduate students and their professor in the Department of Educational Foundations at the U of S write about taking their students into “nearby nature” for learning.

COMMUNITY TRACES
27 RESULTS BASED CONSERVATION AGREEMENTS
Encourage Species at Risk and Ranching
BY TRACY HARRISON, DON BALAS, ROSS MCDONALD
An overview of Ranchers Stewardship Alliance Inc. (RSAI) to deal with issues that would affect ranching and grasslands through the Species at Risk Act.

CURRICULUM Brought TO LIFE
29 DEFINING FOREST SCHOOL: WHAT DO YOU MEAN “EMERGENT CURRICULUM?”
BY SONJA LUKASSEN
Lead educator of Ottawa Forest and Nature School describes how they use an emergent curriculum.

FAMILY EXPERIENCE
39 TWINS GO CANOE TRIPPING
BY JARED CLARKE AND JEFF MOORE
Jared and Jeﬀ, both fathers of twins, take their families on a canoe trip in Montana and reflect on the experience.

THIS IS MY PLACE
32 PLANTING PLACENTA: NOURISHING A SENSE OF PLACE
BY NICOLE HUCK
A mother writes about connecting her children to the land by physically putting the placenta that nourished them for 9 months in a significant place.

TOWARDS DECOLONIZATION
35 100 DAYS OF CREE
BY AARON WARNER
Grade 7/8 teacher in Regina writes about his commitment to meeting the Truth and Reconciliation Call to Action #14 through a #100DaysOfCre project

REGULARS

1 ENVISAGE
Eco-Literacy in the Early Years
BY KAREN MOYER
2 CONTRIBUTORS
4 DIALOGUE
AN INTERVIEW WITH ANNA MILLER
24 SNAPSHOT
JORDAN WOLFF
17 TEACHINGS FROM THE NORTH
DR. HERMAN MICHELL
36 RESOURCES
Nature Grandparenting
AN INTERVIEW WITH JANA MILLER

What is the Nature Grandparenting Program?

It’s a chance for grandparents and grandchildren to spend one-on-one time together in nature. The experiences are designed to grow the participants’ comfort with, and interest in nature. It’s also a space for grandparents to try out nature mentorship. As a whole, Nature Grandparenting is an opportunity for grandparents and grandchildren to establish shared nature time as a special part of their relationship. Educationally, the experiences are geared toward three to five year old learners, but the facilitation includes the grandparents as co-adventurers. Activities such as hiding a secret cache of cones together promote grandparent-grandchild interaction with one another and nature, rather than the grandparent tagging along as the child’s supervisor. Each week features a different theme such as Shapes in Nature or Secrets and Surprises and I use storytelling and role-play to help animate the theme. At its core the Nature Grandparenting Program is about relationships. It carves out space for grandparents and grandchildren to get to know one another and nature.

Why did you want to start a program like this?

Nature grandparenting is a recurring concept in my life, beginning with my Grandpa Miller. As a child grandpa visited our family farm several times a week and expected my brothers and I to be outside ‘working’ with him. The Nature Grandparenting program is inspired by the role he played in helping me become acquainted with and emotionally attached to the land where I grew up. I feel a sense of responsibility to help facilitate that kind of learning and nature connection within grandparent-grandchild relationships. When my partner and I had our son two years ago, I found myself at a crossroads with ample time to listen to my inner compass. The lump I got in my throat when I thought about starting a Nature Grandparenting program here in Saskatoon told me to take this trail.

The initial idea for Nature Grandparenting was sketched out in a PhD paper titled “Taking Children back to the Garden.” I was exploring the concept of kindergarten as it was initially envisioned in Germany by Fredrich Froebel, who emphasized children playing outdoors in nature. As an Au Pair in my late teens I’d been responsible for taking children to and from a German kindergarten. The beautiful sunlit spaces for children to play, create, and build made an impression on me. In the paper, I proposed seniors participate as nature mentors in a Froebel inspired kindergarten. I believed the participation of seniors could allow for nature mentorship, and increased outdoor time for children because of the lower adult to child ratio.

The idea gathered dust until I re-read the paper early on in my master’s degree. Rediscovering it compelled me to research place-based and intergenerational learning and develop the first version of the Nature Grandparenting Program. I wasn’t able to receive ethics approval to facilitate and research the 90-minute, non-formal nature program for 3-5 year olds and their grandparent. Instead, I researched grandparent and grandchild participation in The Knee High Naturalist Program in Toronto’s High Park. Interviewing the grandparents about their own childhood experiences and how they hoped to afford more nature experiences for their own grandchildren helped me recognize that a facilitated program could be a support for grandparents interested in making nature more accessible for their grandchildren.

I wrote that first paper in 2005 and researched the idea further in 2008-2010. It definitely feels like it’s time I started a program like this.

Why do you think it is significant for grandchildren to spend time in nature with grandparents and vice versa?

The benefits of children interacting with and developing an attachment to nature at an early age are many. There is a large body of research outlining this. Children today, however, are increasingly growing up in urban centres where adult supervision and scheduled activities are the norm. In many families, the combination of these factors has meant children’s access to bio diverse spaces to play and explore is more limited than their parents’ and grandparents’ generations. For the current generation of children, an adult who prioritizes spending time in nature with them is actually making nature more accessible for them. Many of the informal interactions children of previous generations had in the community are now either absent or identified and scheduled into the week. My mother thinks the term “play date” is ridiculous – children don’t need a planned date to play! One way of ensuring children are able to access nature as a place to play is to have someone facilitate it.

Nature mentors don’t need to be grandparents specifically, but I think we should be doing a better job of inviting grandparents to contribute to their grandchildren’s nature experiences. The way our society is currently structured with parents focused on work, parenting and household management, many grandparents are simply in a better position to spend one-on-one time exploring and nurturing their grandchild’s curiosity than parents, childcare workers and teachers are.

For many of the grandparents and grandchildren I’ve worked with, playing together and learning about a shared interest seems to bring them closer together. I’ve also observed that spending time in nature with children gives the grandparents permission to be playful and curious – to not hold back on expressing interest and enthusiasm. Participating with their grandchild allows grandparents see and relate to nature in a different way – they aren’t trying to be productive or complete an agenda. I think the freedom to play children bring is a real gift to them.

What have been some of the successes or highlights of the program so far?

It was only about 15 minutes into the experience on the first day. We were gathered in a secret spot under the protection of spruce trees and the kids were sitting in front of their grandparents who were drawing secret invisible nature pictures on their backs. The kids were wide-eyed with focus and the grandchildren were lovingly using touch to draw on and connect with their grandchild. Even though I was facilitating a bonding activity between grandparent and grandchild and building sense of magic with being tucked out of sight in the trees, I was still surprised to look at the group and see the type of interaction I’d envisioned facilitating years ago happening right in front of me. It’s exciting for me to see what’s been an idea for a long time put into practice.

What tips do you have for grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles, or just friends of small people to help them connect to nature?

• Ditch your phone and your agenda.
• Get down to their level and follow their lead.
• Notice what they are curious about and direct your focus on that area too.
• Invent secret silly games that only the two of you know about.
• Lay on the ground together and watch and wonder.
• Splash, twirl and touch right along side them.
• Make it a habit and elaborate on your shared stories and world of pretend each time.
• Downplay any fears or phobias you might have so that you don’t pass them on.
• Practice using different senses to learn more about your surroundings.
• Take turns surprising one another.
• Step back sometimes and do your own thing nearby.
• Pack a picnic so you can stay longer.
• Visit a nature interpretive centre together before heading outside so that you have some shared knowledge to reference.
• Check out local trail and park guidebooks at your library for ideas of places to visit (e.g. Nature Viewing Sites in and Around Saskatoon).
• Sign up for free Nature Grandparenting Adventure Prompts at www.wildernook.com
NATURE PLAY & EXPLORATION

IN THE STARFLOWERS KINDERGARTEN AT PRAIRIE SKY SCHOOL

“Imagine a classroom with sky for a ceiling and earth for a floor. A room without walls or desks, where young scientists explore the world of bugs; budding writers record their observations; and actors reenact on a natural stage.”

–Boston Schoolyard Initiative

BY ANNA ROSE

Prairie Sky School first opened its doors in 2009, offering an alternative, one-room school that spent a great deal of time out in Nature, enjoying project-based learning. In 2012, we expanded to include a Nature-based Kindergarten. Over the years, the school has grown and evolved into a Qualified Independent School, teaching JK to Grade 8 holistically through art, community and nature.

THE OUTDOOR CLASSROOM

Today, the Starflowers Kindergarten class at Prairie Sky School meets at 8:45 am in the Outdoor Classroom. The children who range from 3-6 years of age, all come dressed for the weather, and ready to spend a great deal of the morning class time learning and playing outside. We have experienced that there is “No such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate attire” and so we stay active outside and dress accordingly. Dressing for the weather is crucial for both enjoyment AND safety.

To help insure that every family is able to meet these expectations, we organize a winter clothing swap every November to encourage families to pass on or pick up any winter outer wear or layers that will help keep everyone warm and comfortable in the Outdoor Classroom. After our winter clothing swap table has been out for two weeks, any left-over clothes are donated to a local charity. This is a great example of our focus on both the environment and building community.

PLACE PRACTICE

nature Play & exploration

in the starflowers kindergarten at prairie sky school

"imagine a classroom with sky for a ceiling and earth for a floor.
a room without walls or desks, where young scientists explore the world of bugs;
budding writers record their observations; and actors reenact on a natural stage."

–boston schoolyard initiative

by anna rose

prairie sky school first opened its doors in 2009, offering an alternative, one-room school that spent a great deal of time out in nature, enjoying project-based learning. in 2012, we expanded to include a nature-based kindergarten. over the years, the school has grown and evolved into a qualified independent school, teaching kj to grade 8 holistically through art, community and nature.

the outdoor classroom

today, the starflowers kindergarten class at prairie sky school meets at 8:45 am in the outdoor classroom. the children who range from 3-6 years of age, all come dressed for the weather, and ready to spend a great deal of the morning class time learning and playing outside. we have experienced that there is "no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate attire" and so we stay active outside and dress accordingly. dressing for the weather is crucial for both enjoyment and safety.

To help insure that every family is able to meet these expectations, we organize a winter clothing swap every november to encourage families to pass on or pick up any winter outer wear or layers that will help keep everyone warm and comfortable in the outdoor classroom. after our winter clothing swap table has been out for two weeks, any left-over clothes are donated to a local charity. this is a great example of our focus on both the environment and building community.
THE RHYTHM OF THE DAY

Students arrive, and reconnect with friends and teachers in the familiar, but ever changing Outdoor Classroom. The teacher sings a welcoming song, inviting everyone to come and gather as a circle of friends. Morning circle time may last anywhere from 5-15 minutes depending on the season, energy and enthusiasm of the children. We sing our morning verse, and then a greeting song in another language that changes every few weeks, inspired by members of our community; so far, this year, we have sung in French, English, Swedish, Michif and Polish. Seasonal action rhymes and clapping games usually make up the rest of our circle time, which wraps up with some simple yoga.

After circle time, we are ready to go on a nature walk; this varies from a walk around the block to exploring the neighbourhood, including parks, alleys and enchanted forests. We may look for treasures along the way, playing “I Spy With My Little Eye.” This year’s class has enjoyed turning berries into beads, and making beautiful bracelets and necklaces from nature’s bounty. On rainy days, we may look for the best puddles to splash in, or rescue earthworms from drowning. On snowy days, we may try to catch snowflakes on our tongues. “Mine tastes like clouds.” “Mine tastes like ice-cream.”

GARDENING

During the spring and fall, we spend at least one day per week gardening. Last year we planted a Rainbow Bed in the school garden, as well as helping our friends at a nearby Senior’s Care Home to plant some vegetable in pots, or a classmate’s family plant their vegetable garden nearby. We usually plant a living play house out of sunflowers, sunchokes and runner beans. This makes a wonderful observation station where we can see ladybugs, ants, aphids and bees up close. In the fall, the children harvest tomatoes, sunflower seeds and beans, learning about cycles of nature along with developing fine motor skills. Even in the winter, the tall, dead sunflower stalks can help to support a snow fort and feed birds and squirrels. We enjoy making warming teas for snack time from the herbs we have dried each year.

With some help from the Little Green Thumbs organization, we also plant an indoor garden to continue growing food even during the winter. It’s amazing to harvest home-grown purple peacock pole beans in February, fresh herbs for our soup days and tasty sprout for snacks. In the spring, we start seeds to transplant into the outdoor school gardens, or for children to take home.

WHAT ABOUT WINTER?

In a Nature-based program like ours, we are outside year-round, but through the cold months, we also relish a bit more time enjoying the Indoor Classroom. We have opportunities to explore a variety of different art media and handwork activities such as: sculpting with clay, playdough or wire, as well as sewing, beading, braiding, finger-knitting and needle felting. We also love finding treasures from nature to bring inside to explore, sort, build, play and create with.

Every Friday, the Kindergarten cooks Stone Soup. Families are invited to send a vegetable to school in the morning and then come and join us for a hot, nourishing soup each week from October to May. After helping to chop and prepare the vegetables, the children collaborate on naming the soup and creating a Soup Sign out of chalk, to illustrate all the ingredients that went into our masterpiece.
THE OUTDOOR CLASSROOM IN WINTER

Our sense of place includes more than just the school yard, and actually encompasses the whole community. On snowy days, we love to find an open space with untouched snow for us to make our own prints through. We might play an old game of ‘fox and goose’, or look for tracks of different animals around the neighbourhood. We practice making our own marks like patterns or the letters of our names in strips of frost or snow along benches, railings or snow covered garden boxes. We build snow families and snow forts, draw pictures with sticks or foot prints. Most winters provide us with an ever changing canvas on which we can create original works of art.

Winter can be long and cold here on the prairies, but still we begin each day outside. If the temperature dips below -30 degrees celsius, we will not stay outside for very long. As long as we stay active and playful, the time flies by quickly even on very chilly mornings. What better way to learn about forces than to make our own marks like patterns or the letters of our names in strips of frost or snow along benches, railings or snow covered garden boxes. We build snow families and snow forts, draw pictures with sticks or foot prints. Most winters provide us with an ever changing canvas on which we can create original works of art.

Unlike a simple history lesson, the Story of the Land is alive and far from over. With fabric and other natural materials, we gradually create a large diorama to help bring the story to life for everyone. Over several weeks, we learn about the various plants, animals and nations of people who have lived here over time, and we wonder about what it truly means to be “Treaty People.” We begin to recognize our own relationship with the land, and everyone else who shares this place, and we wonder how we can get along with each other better and walk more gently on the earth.

ART, COMMUNITY AND NATURE IN ACTION

This fall, while making our usual seed collection from snacks and the garden, the children began to notice wild plants and native plants that also have seeds. Our curiosity coincided with our grade seven Big Buddies who happened to be researching native plants, and were eager to share their findings with us. Since then, we have begun collaborating on making our own field guide and native plant seed collection, including our own art-work, illustrating more than a dozen native plants. Recently, the Taproots (Year 6-8) and the Fireweeds (Year 4-6 classes) came to be called “Turtle Island.”

Island.

In the spring, we celebrate diversity and the changing of the seasons. April is Earth Month, where we pick up garbage on our daily nature walks, and notice all the different ways Mother Earth helps to take care of us, and then we wonder about how we can help to take better care of Mother Earth. We learn more about the story of this land that we live on, and how this place came to be called “Treaty Four Territory,” which is part of Turtle Island.

The last week in May, Saskatoon hosts the Nature City Festival, a week of activities and events, organized and showcased on one calendar for all who wish to attend. The events invite people to experience, enjoy, and learn in Saskatoon’s natural(ized) areas. I have been a member of the organizing committee since its inception, five years ago. Each year, by the time the week is over, I am physically tired, and emotionally joyous. I sleep well, and I (for a while) no longer feel the sense that the planet is doomed. Being outdoors, in sunshine, wind, with greenery and bugs, seeing people play, laugh, and be respectful of one another and their places, recharges me. I wonder: in what ways can we enhance children’s emotional and intellectual health by taking them into nearby nature?

Research identifies tremendous physical and health benefits for children derived from being outdoors in natural(ized) areas (Hüttenmoser, 1995; Kaplan, 1995). There is some research suggesting that children also develop better emotionally, with there appearing to be less bullying when children have natural(ized) areas to play in. Other research supports that children’s intellectual development can also be enhanced (Kao & Faber Taylor, 2004). The physical development and health benefits are clearly established (Fjortoft, 2011). More research is required regarding children’s emotional health, and their intellectual development. In the papers that follow this one, teachers / graduate students in the Department of Educational Foundations at the University of Saskatchewan were invited to take their students outdoors into nearby nature for learning. This paper frames the teaching and reflecting that they did.

REASONS FOR LEARNING IN NATURE Emotions

The Public Health Agency of Canada, drawing on 2006 Census data, noted high rates of anxiety amongst Canadian children (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010); however, since this condition was first described in 1980, it is hard to say what the rates of anxiety were prior to the invention of the term. When I was growing up, I remember a peer who suffered from what now would be called “anxiety” – she could not cope with going to school. In my family, although we children often felt nauseous before going to school, we were told to “get over it and go”. However, there is a difference between being mental illness and what fits in the normal range – just as there is for other diseases. If our bodies can cope, we survive. If not, we need support. My peer needed support. Nonetheless, at the time, those of us children who were also anxious (but not suffering from anxiety) wondered if she was not taking advantage of the normal fears we all had about school. She would now, likely, be identified as suffering from anxiety and be given more respect and credibility than she was given fifty years ago. Now that there is a recognized condition, rates of anxiety can be assessed, and the rate of children’s anxiety in Canada is far too high. Drawing on Statistics Canada and British Columbia health data, the Canadian Institute of Health Information (2016) concluded that, for Canadian children 2 to 7 years old, 14.7 percent exhibited high levels of emotional and/or anxiety problems; 6.6 percent were diagnosed as exhibiting high levels of hyperactivity and/or inattention; 14.2 percent exhibited high levels of physical aggression, opposition and/or conduct disorder.

Many blame social media for children’s higher rates of emotional issues, although one wonders how much time that children in the two to five year old range spend on-line. Perhaps it is the standard societal-evil of television that leads to children’s anxiety. Others suggest that children need more time for active play in the outdoors (Louv, 2005). The rise in emotional diagnoses (from original descriptions) parallels the drop in children’s time to wander and wonder in the natural world, with Bird (cited by Darbyshire, in the Daily Mail, 2007) demonstrating a generation by generation drop in range of exploration area, and arguing for more physical activity in green spaces. Malone and Tranter (2003) examined rates of bullying, and found that children who played outdoors in naturalized areas were less likely to engage in bullying and less likely to report being bullied by their peers than children who were
confined to small playgrounds or indoor spaces. We wonder, in what ways does moving children’s learning into natural(ized) areas support them to become emotionally
confined to small playgrounds or indoor spaces.

**Intelectual**

A condition that affects children’s intellectual performance (not their intelligence, but rather their ability to demonstrate it) in school is Attention Deficit Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD/ADHD). Although (as with anxiety) ADD/ADHD are relatively newly described conditions, the rates of diagnosis have increased drastically from its first description, and are far too high. Increasing numbers of children with ADD/ADHD means that more children are unable to focus on their learning. This will also affect children’s intellectual understandings. Research on children with attention deficits has revealed that physical activity in green spaces (versus the same physical activity but in urban streets or in gymnasiums) resulted in significant differences in symptoms of ADD/ADHD to this special group of children (Faber Taylor & Kuo, 2009; Kuo & Faber Taylor, 2004). Kuo and Faber Taylor (2004) found that, interestingly, the reduction in symptoms was not related to burning off energy (since this was available in other locations), nor was the effect due to the novelty of being in green spaces, since rural as well as urban children were involved in the study. Faber Taylor and Kuo (2009) noted that walking in a green area was rated as more enjoyable by the children than walking in an urban or suburban area, and that the effect on concentration for walking in the green area resulted in the children performing as if they were not ADD/ADHD, or as acting if they were at peak performance for having their medication. In other words, walking in the park was as effective as taking medication, and resulted in a complete reduction (for most of the children) in ADD/ADHD symptoms. The authors wondered how long the effect would last. In their earlier paper, they suggested that if children are able to get themselves to and from school by traveling through a green corridor, and if their indoor work space were near a window with a view of nature, they should be experiencing the effects of “green” for most of the day. I would add that children could also have morning, lunch time, and afternoon outdoor recesses. This could drastically reduce the use of drugs for treating attention deficit, as well as increasing the ability of all children to focus.

Faber Taylor and Kuo drew on the theory called Attention Restoration Theory, noting there are two kinds of attention, one being involuntary, and the other requiring a person to focus on a task at hand, and suggesting that ADD/ADHD people struggle more with the latter kind of attention. Attention Restoration Theory is for voluntary focus, which, when we are required to focus on one task, or on one issue for too long, will result in attention fatigue. Even for those who choose the problem they are engaged with, even for those who enjoy the work, there is need for a break to restore one’s ability to focus.

Attention Restoration Theory suggests that the following four factors of being in a different environment: 1) “being away”; 2) finding “fascination” (something that draws involuntary focus); 3) being in a complete environment providing “extent”; and 4) where that environment provides some kind of “compatible” interest for that person, allow a person to relax from demanded attention. The person can then return, refreshed, to the task, able to re-engage (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Kaplan, 1995).

Natural(ized) areas are most likely to offer all these aspects.

Fjortoft (2001) compared two groups of early learners in Norway, finding that the group which spent more time in a natural forest developed greater physical abilities in a statistically significant ways.

The study showed children developed greater balance, strength, and coordination.

**Physical Development and Health**

Sitting has now apparently become the new smoking. Yet still, in many countries children are expected to learn to sit still. In kindergarten, children are still expected and even encouraged to participate in active play, but by grade one, they are more likely to be taught to sit still. Play is important; individual seatwork is also sometimes important. However, at this time in history, children seem to spend far too much time in individual seatwork. Once, while observing a grade one classroom, I noted how often the teacher talked compared to the 25 children arranged in front of her. I also noticed that approximately 8 out of 10 comments she made encouraged the children to sit still. The poem “crisis cross apple sauce” was used to have the children, while seated on the floor, to cross their arms and their legs, to keep them from fidgeting and disturbing their peers. For the same group of students, the physical education teacher had the children running from letter to letter in the gym. The children were changing their alphabet in the gym while moving. In what ways could active outdoor play be incorporated into children’s learning?

This question needs to be examined in its nuances. Children fidget more in the early grades. By high school, children have either learned to sit passively, or have been labeled with some sort of disorder. Children who had chosen to apply to an outdoor school program in my city often noted they chose the program because they wanted to move more (McVitte, Lazekki, Thompson, & Loeffler, 2007). Most of these children had been able to sit still in class, sitting still enough to have developed the skills necessary to learn that there was a special program which involved getting out of the classroom. Should not other children also be supported in being active in the outdoors?

Getting outdoors into natural(ized) settings is more likely to result in children being physically active, and learning through play. As early as 1925, in Sweden, H{"u}ttenmoser found that children attending an “outdoors in all weather” day care facility with surrounding orchards, pastures, and woodlands had better motor coordination and greater attention capacity than did children who attended an urban day care center surrounded by tall buildings. Fjortoft (2001) compared two groups of early learners in Norway, finding that the group which spent more time in a natural forest developed greater physical abilities in a statistically significant ways. The study showed children developed greater balance, strength, and coordination.

S{"o}derstr{"o}m, Boldemann, Sahlin, Mårtensson, Raustorp, and Blennow (2013) examined quality outdoor play spaces in Swedish daycares. They noted that 97% of Swedish children of ages 3 to 5 years old attend day care centres; almost all of them have at least one episode a day in the outdoors. Their study investigated the quality of the outdoor play areas, and amount of time children spent outdoors. Quality of outdoor spaces was assessed using an Outdoor Play Environmental Categories definition: size of natural areas and trees, amount of hilly terrain; interaction with open areas and with play structures. They found that children who spent the full day outdoors in a high quality natural area were leaner, slept better, had greater well-being (which included analysis of 12 month medical historian, as well as parental reports on a four point scale from healthy to very ill), and had appropriate cortisol levels. Cortisol is a hormone which affects activity levels and sleep – when the cortisol level is high, a person is more active, and when low, a person sleeps. Cortisol should be high in the morning, and gradually drop off in the evening so a person can sleep.

Sleep patterns are becoming a significant factor in examining children’s health. Being active outdoors meant children were less likely to nap in the afternoons. I find this with myself. Afternoons are hard for me for concentration; I find myself more creative, more productive, and I sleep better at night. S{"o}derstr{"o}m et al. noted that exposure to sunlight decreased melatonin levels, resulting in children being
"I would like to challenge teachers to research the role of natural(ized) places for the intellectual development of children (especially curricular), for the socio-emotional development of children (with anxiety being a special focus), and, importantly, investigating in what ways getting outdoors into the happier end of the nature spectrum affect the students’ connection to the planet, to ecosystems, to other species.”

able to focus better in the evening, and fall asleep more easily at a reasonable hour. There is research suggesting that on-line screen time is affecting children’s ability to sleep. Apparently the blue screen interrupts normal brain patterns which should allow a child to sleep.

The research from Scandinavia is robust, indicating that children who spend more time outdoors develop in more healthy ways – better strength, coordination, flexibility, quality sleep, reduction in duration of disease. The research is most commonly done in day care and kindergartens likely because there are day cares which have children outdoors all day, in all weather.

As children grow through the school system, they spend more time at their desks; however, in Scandinavia, students still spend time outdoors. Time outdoors saves the health system huge downstream costs, and reduces time loss from work places. The healing effects of nature are increasingly being understood in stressful environments such as hospitals, nursing homes, and university dormitories. In these environments particularly, as well as for people who work in windowless offices, studies show that seeing nature is important to people and is an effective means of relieving stress and improving well-being. Ulrich (1983) first noticed the effects of viewing nature, in a study of recovery time for a group of surgical patients. Those who were in beds close to a window with trees outside required less attention from nurses, stayed in hospital for shorter periods and were less likely to return with post-operative complications. Tennessen and Cimprich (1995) found that university dormitory students who studied with a view of nature out their window were more able to focus. We do not need to wonder about the difference in health that being outdoors makes. Being outdoors supports children’s healthy development in every way – muscle strength, flexibility, coordination, sleep.

SUMMARY

In each case, there are some researchers who explain, for example, the falling heights of IQ, the rise in rates of anxiety and of ADD/ADHD, greater rates of obesity and physical limitations, on children being separated from the natural world. There are also those who blame the ill of schools and society on the current and overwhelming presence of social media. Regardless, getting children outdoors into natural(ized) areas will result in improved physical development and health, not just because they have less access to screen time. Learning in nature makes a huge difference to children’s physical development and physical health. This is reason enough for getting children outside in nature more often. The research regarding emotional and intellectual development requires more work. In what ways does moving classrooms outdoors into nearby nature affect children’s intellectual and emotional development? The teachers’ papers which follow demonstrate how they have gone about taking their students into nearby nature, and are initial explorations of intellectual and/or intellectual development in those places. This graduate course was about finding and using nearby nature, to reduce loss of learning time during commutes, and, as much as possible, to eliminate costs of travel. The issue was to find these nearby places, and to build on the learning affordances there-in. The teachers in this graduate course were willing to make the effort to locate places, and take their students there, and were excited to focus on the research supporting this (indeed, I was learning much about how to get kindergarten to grade 12 students outside from them). Each teacher designed a teaching unit that took their students outdoors, and wrote about their teaching experiences there. My role as the course instructor was to set up and engage in the conversations that emerged. As well, I read over and gave initial feedback on the papers. The papers are written to support other teachers who are willing to get their students outside to learn, providing ideas to be adapted for local contexts. The following set of papers are written for teachers who are willing to step outside the classroom. They provide different justifications and routes for teachers who believe that getting children into more biodiverse places will enhance children’s learning.

DEFINITIONS

For the papers about nearby nature, the following definitions have been used:

Nature is considered as a spectrum. Humans are natural, we are part of nature. What we build – those constructions are also natural. However, an urban environment, with concrete sidewalks, asphalt streets, tall buildings, and little greenery, exists at the sad end of the spectrum – low biodiversity, and so less naturalized. An area which is complete (for Attention Restoration Therapy, an area which has greater extent) with many different species, where the full cycle of life within ecosystems can be observed, is at the happy end of the spectrum. Therefore, a soccer pitch is sadder than a community garden. This does not mean the soccer pitch is undesirable; it serves an important purpose for the community. However, if I were to take my students to nearby nature, I would choose an area of greater biodiversity.

Nearby means a place that can be reached within the time allotted to the teacher, in that day. For this course, one of the teachers had two back-to-back school time slots with her students, and so nearby was farther afield than for a teacher who had only one high school time slot. The elementary teachers had greater ranges because they had greater time with their students. We also considered transportation; if students could access their nearby nature via walking, biking, or public bussing, that was “more” nearby. However, we did not eliminate a project which required chartering a bus. If the teacher had the budget for this, that was wonderful.

REFERENCES


STUDENT PAPER 1: USING NEARBY NATURE TO ENHANCE MIDDLE-YEARS CURRICULUM

INTRODUCTION

Getting students outdoors to learn has always been a preoccupation in my classroom, and after discussions with colleagues I have learned that I am not the only educator struggling with these issues. As an educator I enjoy being outside. I spend most of my free time out at a lake canoeing, camping, or travelling and experiencing different things. Recently, I am finding a connection between myself and my students. Students are finding social media and digital
Technology is to be more important than the values that I grew up with. Most students seem to have an addictive attachment to social media and technology in post-modern society. They seem to be more focused on social hierarchy and where they fit in. When they are interacting with the environment that surrounds them. Many students in the middle years have an obsession with their phones, iPads, and social obligations that distract and deteriorate a traditional classroom learning setting. Since these distractions are taking away from the learning experience, I thought it may be time to change our learning from indoors to outdoors, from the classroom into nearby nature. I teach at an urban school in Saskatoon, with a big beautiful park connected to our school playground. We used this space to conduct our classroom project. In this paper you will see how utilizing the outdoors can be beneficial to student learning and enhance curricular outcomes in the Saskatchewan School System.

**THE TEACHING/LEARNING PROJECT**

**Design Considerations**

Using Karen Constable’s (2014) Early Years Forest School methods as an approach and guide for my classroom project, I created a unit around five basic premises: Health, Self-Esteem, Self-Confidence, Environmental Awareness, and Independence. These premises were important to the development of the unit and final assignment. They provided a rationale and a guide for the development of the unit which included the final project that is discussed later.

“They built the tiny island nation and used pinecones and fallen leaves and branches to represent the country and the protective coral reefs. They then showed me, using a nearby puddle, how the reefs stop tidal erosion.”

**Health**

Rates of obesity, diabetes, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and mental illnesses are on the rise; being outside for as little as 30 minutes a day can improve a child’s health. Richard Louv (2005) states in his book, Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder, that the first study to link television watching to ADHD was done by the Children’s Hospital and Regional Medical Center in Seattle, with Louv noting, “each hour of TV watched per day by preschoolers increases by 10 percent the likelihood that they will develop concentration problems and other symptoms of attention-deficit disorder by age seven” (p. 109). Numerous other studies have linked children’s healthy development to being outdoors (see the paper by McVitie in this issue).

**Self-Esteem and Self-Confidence**

I believe students have become so addicted to social media because they believe it helps validate their own self-worth and social standing in the world. People naturally want to know what is being thought of them and to understand their social identity. Leather (2013) noted: “Self-esteem is used uncritically as a general idiom and synonym for self-concept, self-confidence as well as self-esteem. Self-esteem reveals a person’s overall assessment or appraisal of their own worth and encompasses an individual’s beliefs and emotions” (p.159). “Confidence in young children is affected by the attitudes of the people around them” (Constable, 2014, p. 35). Although Constable’s book speaks to this at a primary student level, I still find this holds true for my middle-year learners. The way their peers observe them both online and in the classroom has a direct correlation with their behaviours and attitudes towards learning. Leather (2013) references the meta-analytical research of J.A. Hattie et al. (1997) which shows that outdoor education programs with a focus on personal development have positive impacts on self-esteem, self-concept, and self-efficacy.

**Environmental Awareness**

Students are becoming more and more detached from the environment. Students need to be able to create a connection to the environment in order to create empathy. When students create an attachment to people, family, or even their technology, they care for it. Thus, trying to connect students to “nature” (the biodiversity areas near them), and help them become more emotionally honest with the grief, anxiety, enjoyment that comes from connecting with nature is important (Marshall, 2014). Creating these feelings in students can help them to empathise with nature. I would argue that without outdoor play students see no reason to be more environmentally conscious.

**Independence**

Students during the final project reached several roadblocks and stumbling points; yet this theme of independence kept me grounded to the purpose of my final project. I wanted students to feel successful upon completion of their project and build on their self-confidence and self-esteem. Giving my students independence to work on their project and dictate their own outdoor educational experience inspired several students to strive for a higher level of learning. Fostering an environment where students could be independent and have choice in their learning was ideal, as Constable (2014) reminds us that, “Being independent is an essential life skill” (p. 37).

**Dynamic Relationships Project**

The project was done for a social studies grade 7 and 8 classroom at a school with a range in socio-economic and racial diversity. As a class, we unpacked the following curricular outcomes to create a unit of study:

- **Dynamic Relationships 7.2: Appreciate the impact of human habitation on the natural environment in Canada, and in a selection of Pacific Rim and northern circumpolar countries and Dynamic Relationships**
- **8.1: Develop an understanding of the significance of land on the evolution of Canadian identity (Ministry of Education, 2017).**

We researched and came up with a general understanding of the indicators for both of these curricular outcomes that led us to an overarching question for inquiry projects: “How does change affect the movement of humans?” With the five themes of Constable (2014) in mind as well as the overarching question my students and I co-created, I implemented three further stipulations:

1. Students had to work outside, no matter what! There was no coming inside during the work classes or being indoors to create the project.
2. Students were to create the project however they wanted but it needed to incorporate nature in some way.
3. I suggested using the ideas that we had learned about in the build up to the final project to help direct them in their projects.

**Breakdown in the Project**

Naturally on the first day of the assignment, my students went squirmish. The new freedom to do whatever they chose resulted in utter chaos outside. Students were asking me what felt like a million questions about how they wanted to do the project, PowerPoint, YouTube, Internet Research, and Creating a Music Video. I had to shut down a majority of the ideas because they needed internet or a computer to do their project, which was in direct violation of stipulation 1. My class was unable to break away from technology long enough to think outside of what traditional school had ingrained in them. After their ideas about using technology changed, many students opted to just burn off energy by playing games in the park like basketball.
soccer, or just getting some kind of physical activity but not actually accomplishing anything towards the assignment. Day 1 appeared to be a disaster.

The Turning Point
I knew I needed to stick with my plan. I believed in my fundamental themes and that they were important to my students, so on day 2, I set a deadline for when the project was due, approximately three weeks later. This changed everything. Students started to understand that this project wasn’t going to change so they had to adapt to their new learning setting in nearby nature. Students began to get creative. A group of students did a dance that represented the carbon dioxide transfer from the burning of unrenewable resources into the water, which then caused coral reefs to die. Another group of students did a skit interviewing Donald Trump about climate change. One quiet student, usually unsuccessful at academic work, went out into nature and sat at a park bench with her journal. She took this time to interview a tree; the journal entry was from the perspective of a person who was upset about how humans are destroying the planet. A notable project was from a group of students who re-created the country of Maldives in a sandbox. They built the tiny island nation and pined tuna and fallen leaves and branches to represent the country and the protective coral reefs. They then showed me, using a nearby puddle, how the reefs stop tidal erosion. They continued to show me how, if the reefs die due to bleaching and rising sea levels, the country could be wiped away. This project led to some students complaining about temperature or rain, which made the project difficult. Second, there was a few students who did not see the value of trying to connect with nature and often made it difficult for others to focus on their projects. Finally, all students became more environmentally conscious and more familiar with the effects of climate change. Some students began to empathise more with the environment. However, I believe this project was a stepping stone for myself as an educator to prove that my students are capable of environmental consciousness. My future goal is to advance my understanding on environmental education and develop a well-rounded curriculum-based learning environment that incorporates outdoor learning to take students away from social media, if only for a while.

REFERENCES

STUDENT PAPER 2: NEARBY NATURE IN A DRAMA 20 CLASS
BY ARON KRUDSEN
As part of our Nearby Nature course described above by Dr. Janet McVittie, I had the privilege of teaching three drama 20 lessons. I chose to place an emphasis on taking learners outdoors to enhance their physical, socio-emotional, spiritual, creative, and intellectual development which was one of the desired course outcomes. I will explain two of the lessons that the Drama 20 class partook in as part of my Nearby Nature course assignment as well as some of my personal reflections and observations.

Our idea of taking learners outside began from the foundational belief that all humans are part of nature, and thus we must stay connected and continue to understand our role within nature. Maller et al. (2005) define nature as an organic environment where the majority of ecosystem processes are present (e.g. birth, death, reproduction, relationships between species). This includes the spectrum of habitats from wilderness areas to farms and gardens. Nature also refers to any single element of the natural environment (such as plants, animals, soil, water or air), and includes domestic and companion animals as well as cultivated pot plants. Nature can also refer collectively to the geological, evolutionary, biophysical and biochemical processes that have occurred throughout time to create the Earth as it is today. This definition allows nature to incorporate so many aspects of life, without limiting who or what can be considered to be nature. The more we include in our definition of “What is nature?” the more we can understand about the complexities and interrelatedness of our planetary system.

I have been an outdoor educator and physical education teacher for 8 years, therefore teaching outside in nature is a common learning space that I have used as many activities are safer to be taught outside. However, in order to challenge myself as a teacher, I chose to teach my three lessons to Drama 20 students, an area that I have never had any experience teaching in before.

Studies in disciplines of ecology, biology, psychology, and psychiatry have examined the human relationship with the natural world, some concluding that as well as being totally dependent on nature for material needs (food, water, shelter, etc.) humans also need nature for psychological, emotional and spiritual needs (see McVittie, this issue). Richard Kahn describes the above as biophilia or the need for humans for direct contact with the Earth. As McVittie describes in detail in the above paper, the healing effects of nature are increasingly being understood in stressful environments such as hospitals, nursing homes, remote military sites, space ships, space stations and educational settings (Lewis, 1996). Hüttenmoser, M. (1995) found that children attending an “outdoors in all weather” day care facility with surrounding orchards, pastures, and woodlands had better motor coordination and greater attention capacity than did children who attended an urban day care center surrounded by tall buildings. The psychological response to nature involves feelings of pleasure, sustained attention or interest, ‘relaxed wakefulness’, and diminution of negative emotions, such as anger and anxiety (Roehde and Kendle, 1994). Evidence has demonstrated that just by viewing nature, many aspects of human health and development can be improved. Additionally, being in natural environments invokes a sense of ‘oneness’ with nature and the universe, and that being in nature can lead to transcendental experiences, strongly influencing our spiritual being.

For day 1 of the unit, the plan was to spend the whole time walking around downtown without a destination in mind. This would allow the conscious mind to focus on the given objective, which was to pay particular attention to the images, signs, messages, and displays that they noticed. From these visuals, they were to write down 30-40 words/phrases. We reconvened back in front of the Midtown Plaza where the students shared their words and phrases that they noticed. The intended curriculum was to discuss imagery, and the effect that costumes, stage props, clothing, lighting, make-up etc. can enhance or help deliver a performance. We reconvened back as a group, students then turned reading their words and phrases that they noticed in downtown Saskatoon. Conversations revolved

“For day 1 of the unit, the plan was to spend the whole time walking around downtown without a destination in mind. This would allow the conscious mind to focus on the given objective, which was to pay particular attention to the images, signs, messages, and displays that they noticed. From these visuals, they were to write down 30-40 words/phrases. We reconvened back in front of the Midtown Plaza where the students shared their words and phrases that they noticed. The intended curriculum was to discuss imagery, and the effect that costumes, stage props, clothing, lighting, make-up etc. can enhance or help deliver a performance. We reconvened back as a group, students then turned reading their words and phrases that they noticed in downtown Saskatoon. Conversations revolved
around topics such as promotions to buy merchandise and clothing, pressure tactics such as signs that read "SALE ON NOW!"; students described their experience as seeing women’s clothing being displayed on mannequins as dressing provocative in comparison to men's clothing as “stylish” and “professional.” A powerful and unintentional moment occurred when one student noted the contrast between the people outside the Lighthouse (a social services facility offering a wide range of supports) and the people that were one block over using the Royal Bank of Canada, an expensive athletic wear store called Lululemon and GMG; hoard of jewelers, a prominent jewelry store. This brought a silence over the class and lead to discussions around social justice, poverty, and inequality in the city. A few of the youth felt bad because of the excitement they showed when they all came back bragging about how they had spent $6 on a Starbucks drink and that they saw a window display of a Tim Hortons selling for $8.25.

On the bus ride back, I tried to relate the whole exercise back to the use of imagery during a performance (a Drama 20 outcome). I didn’t feel as though they were wanting to talk about Drama, they were busy talking about all the things they saw while wandering around downtown Saskatoon. We talked about how we usually don’t walk around without intention while trying to pay attention to the images and messages flooding into our sensory system. We are usually walking with a purpose to get something, pick something up, or go meet someone. When we slow down and purposefully pay attention to as many details around us, we begin to consciously wake up and begin to understand our place in nature, as well as our interconnected web. We begin to reveal that which is important to our values and beliefs, i.e.: The group excited over spending $6 on a Starbucks and obsessed over an $8.20 watch vs. the youth who noticed the hungry kids in need of food, health, and clothing. This lesson also allowed the youth to spend an hour walking in fresh air, with unrestricted guidelines or direction on how to go get something, pick something up, or go meet someone. This little detail perked up some of the students. One of the youth, wearing just a bunnyhug, leggings and sanuks, told me if they get sick it’s my fault for bringing them outside in cold weather. I asked the student where they received the information that spending time outside in the cold will make them sick. The student said it’s a well-known fact, that’s why they never leave their basement in the winter. A few other students shivering, nodded in agreement with the youth. I gave them some hot chocolate and they reluctantly went off to join their group.

When the students performed their creative skits, some performers were rolling in the snow, some were running through the audience, many of them were thoroughly engaged, imaginative, and many were laughing and cheering on the performers. This playful quality was also noticed in the performance. Some educators view the role of natural elements in children's environments, making them as ‘safe as possible’. This is an interesting point into children’s environments, making them as ‘safe as possible’. This is an interesting point into children's environments, making them as ‘safe as possible’. This is an interesting point into children's environments, making them as ‘safe as possible’. This is an interesting point into children's environments, making them as ‘safe as possible’. This is an interesting point into children's environments, making them as ‘safe as possible’. This is an interesting point into children's environments, making them as ‘safe as possible’. This is an interesting point into children's environments, making them as ‘safe as possible'.

Human Development and the Environment: Early Education for Sustainability, edited by J. Keeler (2008). Early childhood educators’ use of natural outdoor settings as having aesthetic rather than educational value. Some educators view the role of natural elements in children’s environments, making them as ‘safe as possible’. This is an interesting point into children's environments, making them as ‘safe as possible'.

REFERENCES
PRACTICING ATTENTIONNESS

BY RACHEL REGIER AND KEONIE GREEN

In recent years researchers have continued to uncover the myriad benefits of experiences with nature. Social, physical, and mental health outcomes are being discovered and defined (Hartig, Mitchell, de Vries, & Frumkin, 2014). In fact, one study has shown that even a view of nature out a window can reduce pain and hospital stays in patients following standard operations (Ulrich, 2014). In order to maximize these benefits we must be aware of the natural world that surrounds us. With the distractions of the modern world we might pass by the therapeutic benefits of nature without noticing. In the same way we might pass by the ecological and socio ecological injustices that unfortunately are woven into the fabric of our modern social structures. Walking up to these ideas demands open eyes and a perceptive, curious, and creative mind.

A class of grade 10 students in Saskatoon engaged in three lessons to practice nature perception and attentiveness on the banks of the South Saskatchewan River. The spot on the riverbank was chosen because bike trails in the brush provide access to a small clearing that provides a feeling of nature immersion within a walking distance from the school. The place provided a great deal of natural opportunity for being surrounded by native trees and shrubs. Returning to this gathering spot over time allowed students to compare and notice differences in the plants, sky, river, wildlife, and their own bodies. The walk to this place was valuable, allowing students to mentally and physiologically transition from the classroom setting. All of the activities listed below require the students to take their time observing the world around them. In each lesson, this type of practice is in stark contrast with the rush and quick-answer culture that is normed in the school. Even when the weather was cold, students commented that being outside felt nice on their eyes and in their lungs.

The first lesson required students to practice differentiating between the life forms that may have seemed similar or common around them. Students were placed into pairs and one was blindfolded. The blindfolded student was carefully led off the path by the partner who placed the blindfolded student’s hands on the trunk of a tree. The blindfolded student could then take as much time as desired to feel the texture and characteristics of the tree. After again returning to the path, the blindfold was removed and the student was challenged to find the tree just encountered. In most instances the students were able to identify the correct tree. Students described how on being able to pick out the tree just met, and many pointed to the positioning or shape of holes, and branches. As a class we discussed the value of the uniqueness of each tree, that a perfectly placed took might provide a hiding place for a creature, while a nicely shaped stick might be the perfect addition to a bird’s nest. We discussed how diversity is a strength, both in this ecosystem, and in our learning community.

The second and third lesson took place during a field trip to Blackstrap Provincial Park. This special trip was made near the beginning of the semester to help nurture a class community and provide a unique and memorable experience, however these lessons could have taken place in the nearby nature of Saskatoon as well. For the second lesson the students were engaged in a scavenger hunt with the aim of allowing the students to observe and develop an appreciation for nature while recognizing the multifaceted uses of items found in nature that could be used to aid in living off the land. Prior to the start of the hunt, the students were placed in groups and given a set of tasks: searching the designated land space to locate items that: 1) can be used to make a rope, 2) can be used to cut said rope, 3) could support starting a fire, 4) showed evidence of a nonhuman creature, 5) was a home of a nonhuman creature, and 6) does not belong. Upon their return to the central gathering spot, they reflected on the activity and discussed the items found. Students were excited to show items that fascinated them, such as a bird nest, and some deer bones. Discussions were had regarding the origins and value of various items in nature, and also how we might use some of these items to perform tasks (make a fire or a fishing spear for example) in a safe manner.

The second phase of this lesson involved trying to do some of the activities that were discussed in our previous debriefing. Using the materials they found, the students were engaged in activities such as using grass to make rope which they then experimented with to see if it would be strong enough to carry small buckets with water. Twigs and other items found during the scavenger hunt were used to make a fire for roasting hot dogs and marshmallows. Some students were so engaged in this activity that they did not want to stop for lunch, but rather desired to continue to refine their designs to more effectively carry more buckets of water. During the discussion after both activities, the students expressed concern about foreign items found in the environment, the ramifications of human actions, and how these shape the outdoor landscapes.

The third lesson required the most reflection. For this activity, each student found their own place near our common spot. Once settled in, students identified one element of the natural world with which to engage. Choices included a creek running down the riverbank, a nearby rock, a tree, and the wind. Then students engaged this entity in an interview of at least ten questions. Conversations included questions of humans’ role in the natural world, the purpose of life, and what it means to be alive. This activity seemed to provide an opportunity for students to explore wonderings that they may not have had the opportunity to discuss in day to day life. This lesson included acknowledgement that humans are unique in our ability to give voice to our feelings and experiences. Listening to, and speaking up for elements of the natural world is a gift that can be given back to nature, and helps to build a reciprocal relationship between humans and other constituents of the ecosystems that we are a part of.

Though many of the interviews were amiable, several imagined the natural element to express the idea that nature regards humanity as bad and destructive. This indicates a sense that the students feel that, as humans, they are separate from nature, and that the natural world would be better off without us. I feel that these perceptions of animosity might present a deeper connection to the natural world. Calderon (2014) writes, land education “asks us to rethink our relation to the land as a dynamic ecological and cultural project of recovery and rehabilitation” (p.26). I wonder how I, as a teacher striving to teach in a land-based way, can encourage my students to reframe this perception to one in which nature views humanity with wonder and respect, with humans being a species that has the potential to creatively care for and nurture the biodiversity around us.

Learning transcends the classroom and this was evident in the various activities that were executed throughout this series of lessons. These lessons were geared towards allowing students to form valuable connections to our environments and develop an appreciation for the natural world through learning in nearby nature. Through the various activities of interacting with the outdoors, issues were raised about the role humans play in the degradation or depletion of our natural environment. By well-conversing conversations, the students developed a deeper awareness of issues impacting the environment and the importance of coexisting and cohabiting with all living things. We hope that with them knowing that, through our actions, we can either improve or degrade our environment, they will work to sustain it.

REFERENCES:


Even when the weather was cold, students commented that being outside felt nice on their eyes and in their lungs.

The second and third lesson took place during a field trip to Blackstrap Provincial Park. This special trip was made near the beginning of the semester to help nurture a class community and provide a unique and memorable experience, however these lessons could have taken place in the nearby nature of Saskatoon as well. For the second lesson the students were engaged in a scavenger hunt with the aim of allowing the students to observe and develop an appreciation for nature while recognizing the multifaceted uses of items found in nature that could be used to aid in living off the land. Prior to the start of the hunt, the students were placed in groups and given a set of tasks: searching the designated land space to locate items that: 1) can be used to make a rope, 2) can be used to cut said rope, 3) could support starting a fire, 4) showed evidence of a nonhuman creature, 5) was a home of a nonhuman creature, and 6) does not belong. Upon their return to the central gathering spot, they reflected on the activity and discussed the items found. Students were excited to show items that fascinated them, such as a bird nest, and some deer bones. Discussions were had regarding the origins and value of various items in nature, and also how we might use some of these items to perform tasks (make a fire or a fishing spear for example) in a safe manner.

The second phase of this lesson involved trying to do some of the activities that were discussed in our previous debriefing. Using the materials they found, the students were engaged in activities such as using grass to make rope which they then experimented with to see if it would be strong enough to carry small buckets with water. Twigs and other items found during the scavenger hunt were used to make a fire for roasting hot dogs and marshmallows. Some students were so engaged in this activity that they did not want to stop for lunch, but rather desired to continue to refine their designs to more effectively carry more buckets of water. During the discussion after both activities, the students expressed concern about foreign items found in the environment, the ramifications of human actions, and how these shape the outdoor landscapes.

The third lesson required the most reflection. For this activity, each student found their own place near our common spot. Once settled in, students identified one element of the natural world with which to engage. Choices included a creek running down the riverbank, a nearby rock, a tree, and the wind. Then students engaged this entity in an interview of at least ten questions. Conversations included questions of humans’ role in the natural world, the purpose of life, and what it means to be alive. This activity seemed to provide an opportunity for students to explore wonderings that they may not have had the opportunity to discuss in day to day life. This lesson included acknowledgement that humans are unique in our ability to give voice to our feelings and experiences. Listening to, and speaking up for elements of the natural world is a gift that can be given back to nature, and helps to build a reciprocal relationship between humans and other constituents of the ecosystems that we are a part of.

Though many of the interviews were amiable, several imagined the natural element to express the idea that nature regards humanity as bad and destructive. This indicates a sense that the students feel that, as humans, they are separate from nature, and that the natural world would be better off without us. I feel that these perceptions of animosity might present a deeper connection to the natural world. Calderon (2014) writes, land education “asks us to rethink our relation to the
BY JORDAN WOLFF

As part of a place-based education class (ECUR 315) taught by Barbara Mills in the College of Education at the U of S, students were assigned an OSM [one square meter] project learning from the land. As part of this project, Jordan Wollf created a series of poems regarding his learning from the land. These poems take place in the same location over the period of 3 months and document the changes observed over this time.

January 21 – OSM 1
HIDDEN AND SILENT
Nothing but the sound of birds and silence. Distants cars but they are not a part of here and now. This is different. This is separate.

Just me, my thoughts. Like my thoughts, hidden and silent.

February 17 – OSM 2
SAID THE TREE TO THE WIND

Whisper around me, shape what I know, dance and rustle, give life to the dead. Rush past me, Bow through, sway and shake me, but never move me. Friends have fallen, you have shown, power in stillness, veiled strength unseen.

Center for Truth and Reconciliation.

March 3 – OSM 3
BY FAITHFUL SIGHT
Paradoxical and strange, the new light this darkness brings, unrolling presence of power, blinded by light and seen in this hour.

In the stillness I feel it, I know I am not alone, the soft whisper of Heaven, the gentle calling forth.

A road calls me further, the illumination of silent guard, ever calling gently guiding under stars.

In wonder I turn, pillar of salt and fear, the world now bearing bleak, forbidding my retreat.

The road turns slightly, suddenly a shift.

Nothing now left but thieves and liars, tricked. fooled. Ignored. but ever deceived, never seeing the beauty that was.

wonder at the beauty that is
so some civilian may sit and ponder,
Peering over the orderly plain,
how artificial the cold iron bench,
death of innocence by seeking solace.

Nothing now left but thieves and liars, tricked. fooled. Ignored. but ever deceived, never seeing the beauty that was.

March 11 – OSM 4
STUDY
Intricate, hidden
Examine, study and know
Or pass by, miss it

March 17 – OSM 5
REMEMBER
I close my eyes and listen.
First nothing, silence, the warmth of the sun.
Then birds, peaceful, lightly calling on the gentle breeze. Then I remember,

I remember when I was young,
I remember lying on the grass basking in the sunlight,
I remember the farm, my family, my sister,
The renewing spring breeze, driving, laughing.
And I miss it.

I smile. I open my eyes.
This is what I feel,
I feel peace.
I wander this oasis,
Fixed in the fields of development.
The road turns slightly, suddenly a shift.

Nothing left but thieves and liars, tricked. fooled. Ignored. but ever deceived, never seeing the beauty that was.

March 18 – OSM 6
PERHAPS

And leave the world behind.
Inviting me to enter in
the song of 6 birds dances on the gentle waft,
they forgive.
they do not fear,
they flutter among the trees and rest within my reach.

They invite me in,
Yet all mingle and touch the sound of the other.
each sings a song distinct and unique,
their melodies intertwining to harmonies,
but what I hear is the song of 6 birds,
It is neglect, it is shameful.
It is not even assault or attack,
Yet what I see is ignorance.
they are only awaiting the return of tenants.
realization that homes untouched are not abandoned,
what I feel is revival.
It is not what I feel.
for what I see is not what I hear,
It is not even assault or attack,
Yet what I see is ignorance.
they are only awaiting the return of tenants.
realization that homes untouched are not abandoned,
what I feel is revival.
It is not what I feel.
for what I see is not what I hear,
It is not even assault or attack,
Yet what I see is ignorance.
they are only awaiting the return of tenants.
realization that homes untouched are not abandoned,
what I feel is revival.
It is not what I feel.
for what I see is not what I hear,
It is not even assault or attack,
Yet what I see is ignorance.
they are only awaiting the return of tenants.
realization that homes untouched are not abandoned,
what I feel is revival.
It is not what I feel.
for what I see is not what I hear,
It is not even assault or attack,
Yet what I see is ignorance.
they are only awaiting the return of tenants.
realization that homes untouched are not abandoned,
what I feel is revival.
It is not what I feel.
for what I see is not what I hear,
It is not even assault or attack,
Yet what I see is ignorance.
they are only awaiting the return of tenants.
realization that homes untouched are not abandoned,
what I feel is revival.
It is not what I feel.
for what I see is not what I hear,
It is not even assault or attack,
Yet what I see is ignorance.
they are only awaiting the return of tenants.
realization that homes untouched are not abandoned,
what I feel is revival.
It is not what I feel.
for what I see is not what I hear,
It is not even assault or attack,
Yet what I see is ignorance.
they are only awaiting the return of tenants.
realization that homes untouched are not abandoned,
what I feel is revival.
It is not what I feel.
for what I see is not what I hear,
It is not even assault or attack,
Yet what I see is ignorance.
they are only awaiting the return of tenants.
realization that homes untouched are not abandoned,
what I feel is revival.
It is not what I feel.
for what I see is not what I hear,
It is not even assault or attack,
Yet what I see is ignorance.
they are only awaiting the return of tenants.
realization that homes untouched are not abandoned,
what I feel is revival.
It is not what I feel.
for what I see is not what I hear,
It is not even assault or attack,
Yet what I see is ignorance.
they are only awaiting the return of tenants.
realization that homes untouched are not abandoned,
what I feel is revival.
It is not what I feel.
for what I see is not what I hear,
It is not even assault or attack,
Yet what I see is ignorance.
they are only awaiting the return of tenants.
realization that homes untouched are not abandoned,
what I feel is revival.
It is not what I feel.
for what I see is not what I hear,
It is not even assault or attack,
Yet what I see is ignorance.
they are only awaiting the return of tenants.
realization that homes untouched are not abandoned,
what I feel is revival.
It is not what I feel.
for what I see is not what I hear,
It is not even assault or attack,
Yet what I see is ignorance.
they are only awaiting the return of tenants.
realization that homes untouched are not abandoned,
what I feel is revival.
It is not what I feel.
for what I see is not what I hear,
It is not even assault or attack,
Yet what I see is ignorance.
they are only awaiting the return of tenants.
realization that homes untouched are not abandoned,
what I feel is revival.
It is not what I feel.
for what I see is not what I hear,
It is not even assault or attack,
Yet what I see is ignorance.
they are only awaiting the return of tenants.
realization that homes untouched are not abandoned,
what I feel is revival.
It is not what I feel.
for what I see is not what I hear,
It is not even assault or attack,
While his cattle graze on a large tract of native grass on the Divide – Orin Balas of Ponteix, Saskatchewan has been working to reduce the divide between the ranching community and those who are not familiar with the environmental benefits that he and his neighbours provide. “As a group, ranchers usually are just more comfortable just being ignored - but that seems to have stopped. And so by telling the positive story of what ranching can contribute to the ecosystem – that is a positive for me. I think that’s something that the public has to be made aware of. I think the ranchers need to be given credit and recognition for their resilience to poorly designed programs and policies that came along in the past,” said Balas, noting that historically, people on the land were given incentives to plow the land and introduce new crops. It seems that now, the ranchers that resisted partaking in those programs are the ones that now have species-at-risk left on their land and a diversity of wildlife species.

The Balas ranch is located midway between the towns of Val Marie, Mankota, and Ponteix and is divided into two blocks: summer range and winter range. Balas explains, “The summer range is all native grass and it’s right on the divide north of Val Marie, pretty well surrounded on all sides by other ranches that have all native grass – so that’s a huge block of native grass.” The winter range is located about 10 miles northeast and includes farmland that was seeded back to grass. “I run the ranch as a year-round grazing operation if I can get away with it and try to stockpile grass rather than bale it,” said Balas, adding that he has consulted with range specialists to help undertake numerous projects over the years.

To improve his management, he’s had to make decisions about herd movement, livestock watering development, and fencing – all with consideration for the Sprague’s Pipit, a grassland songbird protected as a species at risk.

**RESULTS BASED CONSERVATION AGREEMENTS ENCOURAGE SPECIES AT RISK AND RANCHING**

**BY TRACY HARRISON, ORIN BALAS, ROSS MACDONALD**

“The summer range is all native grass and it’s right on the divide north of Val Marie, pretty well surrounded on all sides by other ranches that have all native grass – so that’s a huge block of native grass.” The winter range is located about 10 miles northeast and includes farmland that was seeded back to grass. “I run the ranch as a year-round grazing operation if I can get away with it and try to stockpile grass rather than bale it,” said Balas, adding that he has consulted with range specialists to help undertake numerous projects over the years.

To improve his management, he’s had to make decisions about herd movement, livestock watering development, and fencing – all with consideration for the Sprague’s Pipit, a grassland songbird protected as a species at risk.

**COMMITMENT TO THE INDUSTRY**

As a longtime member of the Saskatchewan Stockgrowers Association, Balas held various positions on its executive and served as the land-use chair for a number of years. Through the organization, he was also appointed chair of the Saskatchewan Prairie Conservation Action Plan (PCAP) – a partnership of 30 agencies and organizations. Through this role he has been able to share the positive story of ranching with more people – and even bring them out to his ranch.
RESULTS ON THE RANCH
In light of the federal Species-at-Risk Act (SARA), Balas also collaborated with other ranchers to become more knowledgeable about the role they could play as land managers:

“About seven or eight years ago, a group of us got wind of the South of the Divide Multi-Species at Risk Action Plan for southwest Saskatchewan, which focuses on the recovery of 13 species in the area, and the planning that was going on. We got together, had some discussions about it and decided to form a group called the Ranchers Stewardship Alliance Inc. (RSAI) to deal with issues that would affect ranching and grasslands through the Species at Risk Act.”

said Balas, noting they developed site level habitat targets that ranchers can work towards.

When the South of the Divide Conservation Action Program Inc. (SODCAP Inc.) was officially established in 2014 as a board-governed partnership, represented by industry, agriculture, and environmental non-governmental organizations – Balas was also elected to the board as RSAI’s representative and co-chair.

SODCAP Inc. fosters engagement, extension and projects with land managers.

“We looked at what other jurisdictions around the world have done about species at risk and the land managers that are creating habitat for them.”

said Balas, noting they developed site level habitat targets that ranchers can work towards.

In exchange for achieving the desired habitat targets, producers are rewarded with financial incentives. Habitat assessments, reviews, and payments to producers will occur on an annual basis. Agreements are designed to encourage producers to manage their land and make management decisions that support species-at-risk habitat. The habitat result targets are more than current industry standards for livestock and forage production. Agreements are structured so that the producer is rewarded financially upon achieving the habitat results. If habitat goals are not met, it simply means a financial payment is not triggered.

Technical advice on species at risk and habitat targets is provided, but all management decisions are left in the hands of the producer.

For more information visit the SODCAP Inc. website: www.sodcap.com or find us on Twitter and Facebook.

DEFINING FOREST SCHOOL:
WHAT DO YOU MEAN “EMERGENT CURRICULUM?”

BY SONIA LUKASSEN, LEAD EDUCATOR AND MANAGER REGIONAL PROGRAMS, OTTAWA FOREST AND NATURE SCHOOL


Emergent Curriculum can be defined as a way of supporting learning that is based on the children’s interest. Learning can occur naturally, and children thrive and learn best when their interests are considered and captured.

Okay. So what does that mean?

EMERGENT MEANS TRUST:

Trusting the land and her creatures to provide provocations

Trusting the students to be inspired, to explore, to ask questions, to be interested and engaged

Trusting myself to be ready to ask questions that deepen a child’s interest, and to bring along materials to extend a curiosity

Trusting that learning is happening even though the child is leading the process and deciding how deep the inquiry delves and how long it lasts

EMERGENT MEANS NOTICING:

Noticing where the deer prints, the owl pellets, the mud puddles and ice floes are

Noticing what children risk into so that I can ask about it, return to it, remind them of it when they need reminding

Noticing when the students need me to step in to help keep their play safe and smart, and noticing when they need me to step back and say nothing at all

EMERGENT MEANS TIME AND SPACE:

Time and space to nurture a child’s understanding that their interests and inputs are valued and worth exploring more deeply

Time and space for the students to get to know each other, the land, their own abilities and passions

Time and space to deeply explore an interest, be it imagining the life of a bear, attempting to identify every kind of mushroom the forest has to offer, or asking in the decomposition of a fallen tree

EMERGENT MEANS ASKING QUESTIONS:

Asking students open-ended questions like “What do you think happened?” or “Why do you think that is?”, “Do you think you can find a way to do that?” or “How do you think we can find out?”

Asking myself how I can help nurture a certain path of inquiry, how I can help to feed a glimmering passion

Asking the members of the group their opinions and ideas so that our activities can reflect and feed their interests

Truly emergent curriculum happens when educators believe that children who wander, wonder and play are also learning. It happens when children’s interests and passions are respected and nurtured. It happens when educators shift our agenda away from imparting knowledge that we consider worthy to showing students that we value their curiosity, problem solving, questions, and theories; when we say “Wow” and “Why do you think?” instead of “Let me tell you about that.”

It isn’t always easy to believe that children are competent enough to lead their own learning, or to allow that each member of a group is learning, exploring, and making meaning of different subjects at their own pace. It isn’t always easy to explain to visiting educators and questioning parents how this process that shifts the curriculum away from the adults into the hands of the children can work so well and be so rewarding and effective.

It isn’t always easy to explain, but once we get into the forest, ensure students know how to make safe choices, step back and set them free there is no need to explain anymore. We watch the process unfold before us.

Emergent curriculum is always possible because children are always curious and interested in learning. We make it possible by getting into the forest and getting out of the way.

CURRICULUM BROUGHT TO LIFE

EMERGENT CURRICULUM?

“EMERGENT CURRICULUM?”

EMERGENT MEANS ASKING QUESTIONS:

Asking students open-ended questions like “What do you think happened?” or “Why do you think that is?” “Do you think you can find a way to do that?” or “How do you think we can find out?”

Asking myself how I can help nurture a certain path of inquiry, how I can help to feed a glimmering passion

Asking the members of the group their opinions and ideas so that our activities can reflect and feed their interests

Truly emergent curriculum happens when educators believe that children who wander, wonder and play are also learning. It happens when children’s interests and passions are respected and nurtured. It happens when educators shift our agenda away from imparting knowledge that we consider worthy to showing students that we value their curiosity, problem solving, questions, and theories; when we say “Wow” and “Why do you think?” instead of “Let me tell you about that.”

It isn’t always easy to believe that children are competent enough to lead their own learning, or to allow that each member of a group is learning, exploring, and making meaning of different subjects at their own pace. It isn’t always easy to explain to visiting educators and questioning parents how this process that shifts the curriculum away from the adults into the hands of the children can work so well and be so rewarding and effective.

It isn’t always easy to explain, but once we get into the forest, ensure students know how to make safe choices, step back and set them free there is no need to explain anymore. We watch the process unfold before us.

Emergent curriculum is always possible because children are always curious and interested in learning. We make it possible by getting into the forest and getting out of the way.

EMERGENT MEANS ASKING QUESTIONS:

Asking students open-ended questions like “What do you think happened?” or “Why do you think that is?” “Do you think you can find a way to do that?” or “How do you think we can find out?”

Asking myself how I can help nurture a certain path of inquiry, how I can help to feed a glimmering passion

Asking the members of the group their opinions and ideas so that our activities can reflect and feed their interests

Truly emergent curriculum happens when educators believe that children who wander, wonder and play are also learning. It happens when children’s interests and passions are respected and nurtured. It happens when educators shift our agenda away from imparting knowledge that we consider worthy to showing students that we value their curiosity, problem solving, questions, and theories; when we say “Wow” and “Why do you think?” instead of “Let me tell you about that.”

It isn’t always easy to believe that children are competent enough to lead their own learning, or to allow that each member of a group is learning, exploring, and making meaning of different subjects at their own pace. It isn’t always easy to explain to visiting educators and questioning parents how this process that shifts the curriculum away from the adults into the hands of the children can work so well and be so rewarding and effective.

It isn’t always easy to explain, but once we get into the forest, ensure students know how to make safe choices, step back and set them free there is no need to explain anymore. We watch the process unfold before us.

Emergent curriculum is always possible because children are always curious and interested in learning. We make it possible by getting into the forest and getting out of the way.

EMERGENT MEANS ASKING QUESTIONS:

Asking students open-ended questions like “What do you think happened?” or “Why do you think that is?” “Do you think you can find a way to do that?” or “How do you think we can find out?”

Asking myself how I can help nurture a certain path of inquiry, how I can help to feed a glimmering passion

Asking the members of the group their opinions and ideas so that our activities can reflect and feed their interests

Truly emergent curriculum happens when educators believe that children who wander, wonder and play are also learning. It happens when children’s interests and passions are respected and nurtured. It happens when educators shift our agenda away from imparting knowledge that we consider worthy to showing students that we value their curiosity, problem solving, questions, and theories; when we say “Wow” and “Why do you think?” instead of “Let me tell you about that.”

It isn’t always easy to believe that children are competent enough to lead their own learning, or to allow that each member of a group is learning, exploring, and making meaning of different subjects at their own pace. It isn’t always easy to explain to visiting educators and questioning parents how this process that shifts the curriculum away from the adults into the hands of the children can work so well and be so rewarding and effective.

It isn’t always easy to explain, but once we get into the forest, ensure students know how to make safe choices, step back and set them free there is no need to explain anymore. We watch the process unfold before us.

Emergent curriculum is always possible because children are always curious and interested in learning. We make it possible by getting into the forest and getting out of the way.
FAMILY EXPERIENCE

UPPER MISSOURI RIVER

BY JEFF MOORE

My name is Jeff Moore and today I am going to share my devious plan with you. This plan is so top secret that to this point I haven’t even shared it with my wife or kids: I admit that I want to bring my family on a Northern Saskatchewan wilderness canoe trip. There it is, I said it. My wife and I started paddling together nearly 20 years ago. Since then, we fell in love with the splendors of Northern Saskatchewan. Is there anything better then shooting rapids on the Churchill River or floating down the beautiful Paul River? Northern Saskatchewan is one of the most amazing places in the world and I want to share that with my family. My wife, who I freely admit, has much more common sense then I do, enjoyed her Northern paddles immensely until we had kids and now she thinks that there are too many mosquitoes up North. She also points out that the rocks are too slippery, there are no bathrooms or outhouses, we would be out of cell range and the list goes on. I took no chances. Jared and Kristen and their twin boys (who were now 4) were the perfect companions. I planned every detail to a “T”. I had assurances that the river was as scenic and beautiful as anyone could imagine. We brought plenty of food and snacks for the kids, there were plenty of birds for Jared and Kristen, cliffs and scenery for Carmen, nothing was missed. I even took Trevor Herriot’s advice and built a platform, complete with a beach umbrella, that connected our two canoes and allowed the kids to play and get from canoe to canoe. I made sure each campground was a short distance away and that outhouses were at nearly every lunch spot. My plan went exactly as I envisioned until day one on the river when I realized I miscalculated our daily mileage. I think I blamed the guidebook or the knowledgeable and friendly park warden who helped me plan my trip. I stuck to my story throughout the day-two paddle (that was nearly twice as long as I promised my companions). Even a lifetime of being a nerd didn’t prepare me for the unpopularity I had to suffer on that fateful day, but we made it through and the trip was amazing. We are even planning a canoe trip in Meadow Lake Provincial Park this summer and a paddle in Yellowstone next summer. In my mind every successful family trip gets me closer to my goal of tricking my family, and Jared’s, into paddling the Churchill River with me. In the mean time, I guess I am going to have to be happy with creating countless unforgettable memories for my family and I.

I am sure there is a lesson or two to learn out of all of this, but alas, I am not self aware enough to know what those lessons are. As I am obviously not qualified to give anyone advice on paddling I am going to defer to my friend Jared to make sense of this all.

We are blessed to have families who love adventure as much as we do. We hope to enjoy many more family canoe trips together.

JARED’S 10 TIPS FOR PADDLING WITH KIDS
(and having them want to do it again next year):

1. Pack lots of snacks! Keeping the kids well fed helps reduce the whining during long paddles.
2. Be well planned. Know exactly how far you have to travel each day and exactly where you are going. Include regular stops for breaks.
3. Invest in good bug jackets (MEC sells good quality little kid bug jackets that have saved us!)
4. Do some practice paddling with your kids in the canoe, close to home before your trip, so they are comfortable in the canoe before you have them sit in there for hours straight.
5. Keep towels close, a large patio umbrella can provide much needed shade during hot trips (if you can fit it in, and it’s not too windy...)
6. A large patio umbrella can provide much needed shade during hot trips (if you can fit it in, and it’s not too windy...)
7. Let the kids collect sticks and rocks or bring floating toys to play with.
8. Take a camera to capture some memories.
9. Have fun!!
10. Pack lots of snacks. (I can’t stress this enough!!!!)

OF LAND & LIVING SKIES  SUMMER 2017  31
PLANTING PLACENTA: NOURISHING A SENSE OF PLACE

BY NICOLE HUCK

The placenta is an amazing organ. It’s your baby’s first source of nutrition, it helps your baby grow, it helps your baby extract all the nourishment it needs from the mother’s blood. It serves as the immune system, digestive system, lungs, kidneys and liver while in in the womb. That’s why it felt wrong to just throw it away.

I knew people who had eaten their placenta (dried and in capsule form) to get some much needed iron and nutrients after birth. That didn’t appeal to me, so I turned to the Internet for inspiration.

I learned the placenta holds special significance to people all over the world. In many cultures including the Maori of New Zealand and the Navajo, burying the placenta symbolizes the baby’s link to the earth. The more I learned, the more surprised I was that most people in Western cultures just throw it away without even looking at it. To me it wasn’t “medical waste” it was a beautiful piece of me that had nourished my babies for nine months and deserved to be honoured.

I’ve given birth three times under the care of midwives in Regina. Each time, after the birth the midwife checked the newly delivered placenta to make sure it was intact and gave my husband and I an opportunity to really look at this hardworking organ. Only then did I truly understand why some people refer to it as the ‘Tree of Life’. The likeness is uncanny. The umbilical cord makes a convincing trunk and the veins resemble branches stretching out into the sky.

After my first birth in the hospital, I took home my placenta in a blue plastic box. It sat in our fridge for a couple of days until my husband and I figured out what to do with it. One late night Youtube tutorial later, we had my placenta on a cookie sheet and were pressing a sheet of paper down onto the tree-shaped organ. We went one step further and painted the placenta in vibrant colours following the natural lines. Then after the art, the placenta went into the freezer until we were ready to plant it in a special place.

My first born’s middle name is Auburnton. We named him after the little patch of land in the far South Eastern corner of Saskatchewan where his paternal grandfather was raised. One warm autumn day, when my son was one, we took a special trip to that land. We dug a deep hole in the native prairie, talked to our son about this special place and our hopes for him, then put the placenta in the hole and replaced the earth in one intact chunk. A few field stones marked the spot.

For our second child, we brought his placenta into the forest in Northern Saskatchewan where my parents live and where I spent all my summers as a child. It is a special place for me and I wanted our son to have a connection to this patch of woods. We dug a hole beside my favourite tree and thanked the placenta for nourishing our son and expressed our hope that this space would help nourish his love of nature so that he in turn could grow to care for the earth.

We make a point of visiting these places, of honouring the sacredness of these natural spaces, and of reminding our children about the beautiful gift buried beneath the land. Even though the placentas have long since decomposed and have gone on to nourish other forms of life, the land where they are buried helps us connect our children to our families histories and helps root them to this place in the future.

Reference: Buckley, Dr Sarah (July/August 2005), “The Amazing Placenta” sourced from mothering.com Issue 131.
By Aaron Warner

When Senator Murray Sinclair spoke at the University of Regina in 2016 on his participation in, and hopes for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, one thing really stood out for me. Senator Sinclair said that if all Canadians were to embrace just one of the 94 Calls to Action, and work to meet it, imagine the change that could occur.

I took this to heart. I wanted to find an authentic and meaningful way for my Grade 7/8 class to address a Call to Action, and allow them to see the significance that even one gesture can have towards reconciliation in our country. By this age, students have learned about Treaties, and the history and damage that was brought on by the Residential School system.

As a class, we embarked on our #100DaysOfCree project. With each page of McLeod’s book, we are learning the Cree language, and recognizing the historical and current significance that Cree holds in our country. Beyond our exposure to Cree, the topics in the book have created opportunities for authentic and meaningful conversation on topics such as Treaty history, Residential Schools, Indigenous sovereignty, the important role the language holds among Cree people, and the way in which Indigenous history is embedded into our contemporary world.

Within our project, students have taken on small challenges to pass on the language as the Call to Action suggests. Together, they have created learning resources, played games, taught their school how to sing songs in Cree, and committed themselves to learning, even in a small way, the Cree language.

This project has been extremely rewarding, and I recognize daily the value that it is having for my students. I tell them that they are the generation of change. I am very proud of the commitment they have given to this project, and can say confidently that they understand and respect the importance of what Reconciliation means to our country.

I look forward to continuing our 100 Days of Cree this school year. Our class is going to connect with several other classes and learners over social media to further extend our commitment to meeting Call to Action #14, and take our learning beyond our classroom.
LIVING ON THE LAND: INDIGENOUS WOMEN’S UNDERSTANDING OF PLACE

Edited by Nathalie Kermoal and Isabel Alhamirano-Jiménez

Living on the Land examines how patriarchy, gender, and colonialism have shaped the experiences of Indigenous women as both knowers and producers of knowledge. From a variety of methodological perspectives, contributors to the volume explore the nature and scope of Indigenous women’s knowledge, its rootedness in relationships both human and spiritual, and its inseparability from land and landscape. From the reconstruction of cultural and ecological heritage by Naskapi women in Québec to the medical expertise of Métis women in western Canada to the mapping and securing of land rights in Nicaragua, Living on the Land focuses on the integral role of women as stewards of the land and governors of the community. Together, these contributions point to a distinctive set of challenges and possibilities for Indigenous women and their communities.

Download the entire book for free here: http://www.aupress.ca/index.php/books/120256

CAN YOU CANOE? A MISSISSIPPI RIVER ADVENTURE ALBUM

The Okee Dokee brothers. On June 1st 2011, The Okee Dokee Brothers began a canoe trip in Minneapolis, MN and continued down the Mississippi River for the next 30 days until they arrived at St Louis Gateway Arch. During their month long journey, they camped, canoed and filmed but most importantly, composed the songs that make up their new album for family and kids, Can You Canoe? Produced by Dean Jones in his Rosendale, NY hay-bale studio, the record features guest appearances from Garth Hudson (The Band), Elizabeth Mitchell (You Are My Flower), as well as Morgan Taylor and Rachel Loshak (Gustafer Yellowgold). Can You Canoe? won the 2013 Grammy for Best Children’s Album.

ON THE DAY THAT YOU WERE BORN

By Debra Fraser

In simple words and radiant collages, Debra Fraser celebrates the natural miracles of the earth and extends an exuberant welcome to each member of our human family. Accompanied by a detailed glossary explaining such natural phenomena as gravity, tides, and migration, this is an unforgettable book. “A book filled with reverence for the natural order of the world and the place of the individual in it.”—School Library Journal

Book Details: Format: Hardcover Publication Date: 3/15/1991 Pages: 40 Reading Level: Age 5 and Up

EARLY CHILDHOOD ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS: GUIDELINES FOR EXCELLENCE

By The North American Association for Environmental Education

Early Childhood Environmental Education Programs: Guidelines for Excellence is part of a continuing series of documents published by the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) as part of the National Project for Excellence in Environmental Education. The project is committed to synthesizing the best thinking about environmental education through an extensive process of review and discussion. Reviewers include classroom teachers, daycare and early childhood education center staff members, educational administrators, environmental scientists, curriculum developers, and natural resource agency and education department staff members.

Young children are active and inquisitive. Everything is worth exploration with all of their senses. Their minds and bodies are growing at a phenomenal pace, developing neural connections they will use for the rest of their lives. Learning is everything; experience is everything.

This Guide goes through everything you need to take on environmental education with little people. There are chapters on theory, philosophy of why it is important, to outdoor space design, to curriculum framework to educator preparation and schooling. Find it free online here: http://resources.spaces3.com/c518d93d-d91c-4358-ae5e-b09d4932f3f4.pdf

FOR YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

LIVING ON THE LAND: INDIGENOUS WOMEN’S UNDERSTANDING OF PLACE

by David Suzuki and Sarah Ellis, Sheena Lott, illus.

The story provides a framework for information about salmon and their role in the circle of life vis-à-vis rivers, forests, wildlife, and humans. The book’s theme is expressed simply and clearly in the final pages: “In nature, everything is connected.” The father uses a mechanical merry-go-round analogy to deliver the same message. Salmon Forest, co-published by the David Suzuki Foundation, is the collaboration of a British Columbia power trio. Environmentalist David Suzuki, children’s author Sarah Ellis, and illustrator Sheena Lott are highly honoured veterans in their respective fields.

SALMON FOREST

by David Suzuki and Sarah Ellis, Sheena Lott, illus.

The story provides a framework for information about salmon and their role in the circle of life vis-à-vis rivers, forests, wildlife, and humans. The book’s theme is expressed simply and clearly in the final pages: “In nature, everything is connected.” The father uses a mechanical merry-go-round analogy to deliver the same message. Salmon Forest, co-published by the David Suzuki Foundation, is the collaboration of a British Columbia power trio. Environmentalist David Suzuki, children’s author Sarah Ellis, and illustrator Sheena Lott are highly honoured veterans in their respective fields.
NATURE GRANDPARENTING

look to grandparents as learners and mentors
  helping children overcome
  indoorism
  age-segregation
  the boredom of parent knows best

  there is a gate to nature
  grandparent supervision can open
  but permission to pretend and see the world anew
  is granted by the child

  classroom management books won’t teach you
  learning can be situated within relationships
  but look back a century, then another
  place-based intergenerational learning was already developed