

Honoring Mother Earth and Children

Exploring the benefits of Nature-
Based Outdoor Learning in AIAN
Programs

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Session Goals

- Participants will learn about American Indian program strategies for culturally appropriate outdoor learning environments
- Participants will better understand the benefits of nature based learning environments
- Participants will increase their knowledge of how to balance risk and safety in developing natural play scapes

Our “Image of a Head Start Learning Environment”

- When you hear these words what comes to mind?
- What do you feel influenced the image you have of outdoor environments?

Momaday says...

- “Notions of the past and future are essentially notions of the present. In the same way an idea of one’s ancestry and posterity is really an idea of the self.”

Momaday

What does Head Start Performance Standards

- § 1304.21 Education and early childhood development.
- (a) Child development and education approach for all children.
- (1) In order to help children gain the skills and confidence necessary to be prepared to succeed in their present environment and with later responsibilities in school and life, grantee and delegate agencies' approach to child development and education must:
- (iii) Provide an environment of acceptance that supports and respects gender, culture, language, ethnicity and family composition;

The Environment as the “Third Teacher”

- The environment is designed to encourage and support the learning of children.
- The classroom environment supports the educational and cultural values of the school and community. Children have the right to be educated in beautiful and thoughtfully designed spaces.

WHY we infuse culture into our environments?

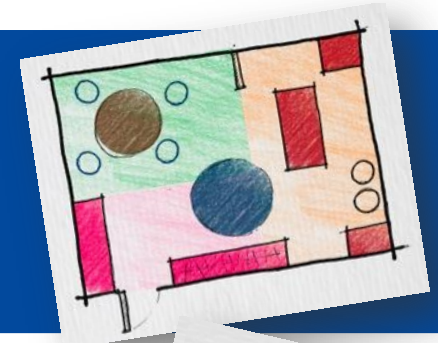
- We are all unique...

Our environments (Indoor and Outdoor) should reflect the uniqueness of our community and be respectful of the children.

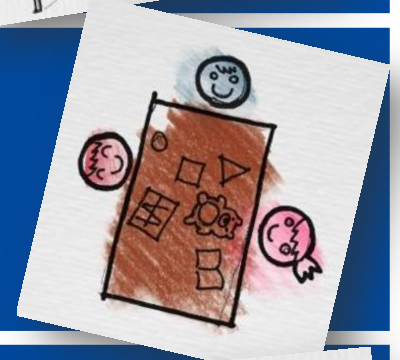
Effective environments

Support
Children's
Engagement

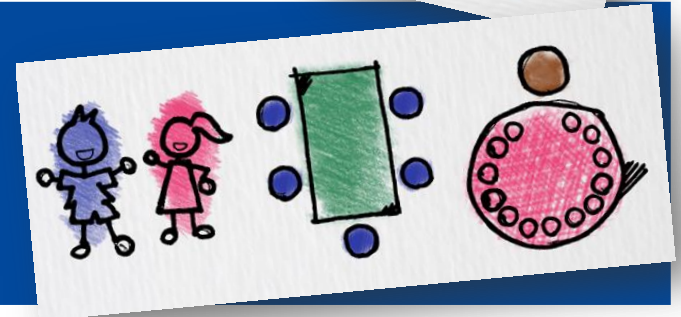
Design
Physical Space



Relevant
Contents



Intentional
Groupings



Outdoor Time

Reflect on your childhood outdoor time.





- Why The Young (And the rest of us)
Need Nature.

“Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that endure as long as life lasts.”

Rachel Carson

- ***If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscover with him the joy, excitement, and mystery of the world we live in.”***

Rachel Carson

Quote from

Last Child in the Woods



Outdoor Learning Environment aka The Playground

Nature vs. Purchased Equipment





“Without the Language, the canoe, paddle, water, seat, the birds you hear are different than what our ancestors experienced. If you know the language then you know what our ancestors heard, saw, felt, and experienced.”

Zalmai “Zeke” Zahir

Language Instructor, University of Oregon

Language

Language Is our identity

In spite of deliberate efforts to destroy the languages, they live.

Government laws and politics pierced the very Soul of our Pueblo People.

Language is the heart of our way of life,

We are a strong Pueblo culture.

Our People will endure

The sacredness of space and place is brought to life through
Language



NATURE BASED LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Effective learning and development experiences in naturalized, outdoor environments offer essential and multiple benefits for families, staff, and young children, especially children and families in Head Start and Early Head Start.

Exploring Risk

- Playground equipment and playground surfacing standards are written to eliminate known hazards
- Compliance with the standards does not mean that the playground cannot be exciting and challenging

Exploring Risk

- Taking risks is fundamental to human learning...developing new skills...trying new behaviors...abandoning the familiar to explore what we know less well

Banning and Sullivan



Courtesy of JC Boushh

Exploring Risk

“That is what learning is. You suddenly understand something you’ve understood all your life but in a new way”

Doris Lessing

Current Trends in Outdoor Play

- Sources: Gill 2007; Madge and Barker 2007; Lester and Russell 2008; Walter 2006
- Reduction in play facilities and opportunities for free play
- Play spaces becoming more boring and sterile
- Risk and challenge are reduced
- Growth of adult controlled, structured play spaces and activities

Current Trends in Outdoor Play

- Western societies are becoming increasingly risk averse with overprotective safety measures
- Getting dirty, bumps, and bruises was considered a natural and acceptable part of childhood

Current Reality in Outdoor Play

- CPSC Playground Safety Standards
- Head Start Performance Standards
- State Licensing Requirements
- Our own institutional and individual appetite

Children as Strategic Planners

- What would happen if.....
- Promoting a sense of wonder
- Learning to ride a bike
 - Time, persistence, motivation
 - Incorporates new concepts and skills
 - Data analysis
 - Implement incremental steps

- An appropriately designed playground for infants and toddlers should include many natural elements such as gentle hills, grass, sand, dirt, shade trees, and so on
- With a thoughtful design, the natural landscape will itself provide opportunities for gross motor play, which can be supplemented with carefully selected equipment.

The Magazine of the National Head Start Association, Children and Families, Spring 2002 by Louis Torelli, Cofounder, Spaces for Children, Berkeley, California.

Journey

- Tell your story of where you feel you are with including culture and language.
- What will you change in your classroom or program

“If we don't teach our children about our culture and traditions that we feel are being stolen from us daily, then at present we are just as guilty of the offense.”

~ Robert Higheagle
Lakota

Words to ponder...

- How can I create a space (environment) where I can see all children “at promise”?
- How can I create a daily environment in which children’s theories, questions, and interests can be listened to and legitimized?
- How can I teach in ways that recognize the many dimensions of the child?
- How can I foster the gifts each child brings?

“Let us put our minds together to see what life we can make for our children”



Recommended Resources for Outdoor Learning Environments

- Last Child in the Woods, Richard Louv (Algonquin Books, 2005)
- Preschool Outdoor Environment Measurement Scale (POEMS), Karen DeBord, Linda L. Hestenes, Robin C. Moore, Nilda G. Cosco, & Janet R. McGinnis (Kaplan, 2005)
- Play and Child Development, Joe Frost, Sue Wortham, & Stuart Reifel. (Prentice Hall, 2004)
- The Developmental Benefits of Playgrounds, Joe Frost et al. (Association for Childhood Education International, 2004)
- Natural Learning Creating Environments for Rediscovering Nature's Way of Teaching, Robin C. Moore and Herb H. Wong (MIG Communications, 1997)
- The Great Outdoors: Restoring Children's Right to Play Outdoors, Mary Rivkin (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1995)
- The Sense of Wonder, Rachel Carson (HarperCollins, 1998)

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