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Recent Progress Toward 1st Learning Parks

There now are two communities with significant progress toward creating the first Learning Parks: Tulsa, Oklahoma and Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Supporters in both cities are about to submit applications to their states to create local, Learning Park nonprofit organizations.

This is a crucial and necessary step on the path toward making any agreements, collaborations or cooperative deals with local nonprofits, governmental entities, or donors, in other words, in order to make any progress toward creating a local Learning Park.

Winston-Salem

Since our last newsletter there was a surprising rise in visits to our website from people in North Carolina, with 32 sessions, of durations ranging from 5 to 24 minutes, by 16 different people, most from the Winston-Salem/Greensboro area. Following this, Paul Tatter was invited to spend seven

days, beginning March 27, in Winston-Salem, meeting with people interested in learning more about a Learning Park.

With the advocacy of local board member Francisco Gallegos, Paul made presentations to Francisco's class at Wake Forest University, and to one informal evening with Wake Forest faculty,



with Wake Forest faculty



Paul and Francisco began each event with a singalong song.



and provided a public, participatory workshop downtown.

Recently elected board member Petra Salazar made an appointment to meet with the CEO of Forsyth County Senior Services at the new Intergenerational Center for Arts and Wellness. He said that in a year or two, after they had completed programming at the center, and formalized collaborations with other nonprofits utilizing the Canter, they would be interested in collaborating with a local Learning Park.



With CEO Lee Covington at the Intergenerational Center



Petra drove Paul to visit a number of potential sites for a Learning Park in Winston-Salem,

Vacant 31-acrs science museum site,

county owned, with approximately 20,000 square-foot building and a second two-story building and two barns, with woods and meadows, and city utilities. Also an adjacent school and county offices and a large hotel and hardware store across the street.



Part of Crossnore's 200-acre site NW of downtown Winston-Salem

25 acre park, crossed by Mill Creek, next to Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools Admin. Center.



and to meet with the Vice President of Planning at the Kaleideum experiential museum,

and Petra made an introduction to the Forsyth County Deputy Director of General Services.



On August 28 and 29 a delegation of the board will visit Winston-Salem and meet with people there. We will view proposed sites and hold our fall board meeting on August 29th at our hotel.



Winston-Salem at night

Tulsa

From June 12th through 16th board president Kevin Mancini and executive director Paul Tatter joined Tulsa area board members Shan Glandon, vice president Randy TL Chalakee and Vlad Tatter from nearby Fayetteville for meetings and two invitational dinners with interested Tulsans that included conversations about next steps toward a Tulsa Learning Park.



Dinner to begin establishment of a Learning Park nonprofit organization in Tulsa

The significant result of these dinners was agreement from local residents to *sign and submit to the state of Oklahoma an application to form a Tulsa Learning Park nonprofit organization.*



Downtown Tulsa from west side of the Arkansas River opposite Johnson Park, potential LP site, on the east side.

We spent a day revisiting potential sites owned by the City of Tulsa, for a careful investigation of their suitability for a Learning Park. Our conclusion was that they all remain viable, and good subjects for discussions with the city. We were surprised that the Tulsa Housing Authority Comanche Park apartment complex in the Phoenix District had been raised, and was now a huge vacant lot bounded on two sides by woods and Butter Creek; still a potential Learning Park site.



Comanche Park one year ago

Comanche Park now

Photographs of potential sites for a Learning Park in Tulsa can be found in Newsletter 14 and also Newsletter 12 on the Readings Page of our website: neweducation.org.

Our spring board meeting was held at The Discovery Lab family museum in Tulsa on June 14th. Paul, Kevin, Randy and Shan were in attendance, while other board members attended over Zoom. Vlad was able to join up with the team the following day.

Kevin and Randy spent the next day meeting with Gretchen Guilette from The Common Good (Northwest Tulsa Hub) located in the Charles Page district. Further information on The Common Good can be found in Newsletter 14. They explored ways to program events that we could cosponsor to begin building the Learning Park brand. In addition, Gretchen provided connections towards possible philanthropists in Tulsa that could begin funding for the Learning Park.

On the last day of the visit, Paul and Kevin attended a Unitarian Church service and were able to reconnect with Reverend Marlin Lavanhar for a few minutes after the service. Paul gave him a status update about our progress and then sat for a few minutes with Anitra Lavanhar to discuss our recent steps, as well as her current endeavors.

READING



Malone, K., & Waite, S. (2016). Student Outcomes and Natural Schooling: Pathways form Evidence to Impact Report 2016. Plymouth University, U.K.; Western Sydney University

ABSTRACT

Over the past ten years there have been five significant reviews conducted around the focus of children learning in natural environments in the UK and further abroad (Rickinson et al. 2004; Malone 2008; Gill 2011; Dillon & Dickie 2012; Fiennes et al. 2015). All these reviews identified significant evidence that outdoor learning can, and has made, a significant impact on improving children's quality of life. These reviews coincide with a time when there is evidence that childhoods are dramatically changing, and children are experiencing limited opportunities to be outdoors in formal or informal learning settings, with consequent negative effects. The evidence especially reveals that lack of exposure to natural environments denies children the opportunity to develop understandings and experiences that will have a long term impact on the quality of their lives, particularly in relation to their physical health and wellbeing and 'character capabilities' such as application, self-regulation, empathy, creativity, and innovation, and their capacity to be successful learners and active contributing members for a sustainable society. This report responds to an urgency to address this social predicament; the childhood disconnect from nature and importance of learning in natural environments, with a view of encouraging policy makers to recognise the value of outdoor learning and the opportunities that it provides to overcome these contemporary challenges to children's education, health, wellbeing and future success in life.

The arguments supporting the importance of learning in natural environments for children's health and wellbeing development and to enhance their educational achievement are built on the assumption that we *know* that children learning in natural environments is essential for developing the whole child and should be valued. But what do we really *know*? Is there systematic evidence to support the intuitive views that often pervade our understanding of the value of learning in natural environments compared to learning in indoors or in constructed unnatural environments?

HEALTH BENEFITS

Medical experts, for example, continue to describe increased levels of obesity as epidemic (Waters & Baur 2003; Stubbs & Lee 2004), with lack of exercise, obesity and sedentary lifestyles being linked to Type II diabetes, other "lifestyle" diseases (Lewis & Ker 2005) and also to lower academic attainment (Chalkley et al. 2015). Research has reported that contemporary children are likely to be at higher risk of developing myopia (short- sightedness) due to reduced outdoor play activities, their lack of exposure to outside light and increased screen time (Ramamurthy at al 2015; Rose et. al 2008, Philip, et. al. 2014). Researchers have established that children's health and wellbeing are linked to children's relationship with being outdoors and being active through play and leisure (Bragg, Wood, Barton & Pretty 2013; Cutter-Mackenzie et al, 2014; Davis, Rea & Waite 2006).

Beyond the health implications of sedentary lifestyles there have been many claims made in literature about the importance of children spending time outdoors (Gill 2011), including the implication of physical activity in supporting children's attainment (Booth et al. 2014). Contact with the natural world can significantly reduce symptoms of attention deficit disorder in children as young as five years old (Kuo & Taylor 2004). Green plants and vistas reduce anxiety levels among highly stressed children and locations with a greater number of plants, greener views, and access to natural play areas showing significant reduction in children's levels of anxiety (Wells and Evans 2003). Being outdoors can also improve children's nutrition. Children who grow their own food are more likely to eat fruits and vegetables (Bell & Dyment 2008) and to show higher levels of knowledge about nutrition (Koch, Waliczek & Zajicek 2006). They are also more likely to continue healthy eating habits throughout their lives (Morris & Zidenberg-Cherr 2002). Research studies have revealed that access to green spaces, and even a view of green settings, enhances peace, self-control and self-discipline within inner city youth, and particularly in girls (Faber-Taylor, Kuo & Sullivan 2002). They are more likely to feel confident and connected to others rather than anxious and depressed. These factors can improve a child's resilience (Kuo 2010).

LEARNING BENEFITS

Proximity to, views of, and daily exposure to natural settings increases children's ability to focus and enhances cognitive abilities (Wells 2000) supporting self-directed learning and has the capacity to improve academic performance. Studies in the US show that schools that use outdoor classrooms and other forms of nature-based experiential education support significant student gains in social studies, science, language arts, and maths. Students in outdoor science programs improved their science testing scores by 27% (American Institutes for Research 2005). Studies of children in schoolyards/playgrounds found that children engage in more creative forms of play in the green areas. They also played more cooperatively (Dyment & Bell 2008). Play in nature is especially important for developing capacities for creativity, problem-solving, and intellectual development (Kellert 2005). According to the studies by Kellert (2005), nature is important to children's development intellectually, emotionally, socially, spiritually and physically.



SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS

Studies have also identified that children who experience natural spaces (including school-grounds during formal learning or in play) with diverse natural settings are more physically active, more aware of nutrition, more civil to one another and more creative (Dyment & Bell 2008). These children according to studies will be more adaptable, better able to get along with others, healthier and happier when they have regular opportunities for free and unstructured play in the out-of-doors (Burdette & Whitaker 2005; Waite & Davis 2007; Waite, Rogers & Evans 2013) developing noncognitive skills that underpin successful team working, perseverance and management of stress (Birdwell et al. 2015). Social and emotional skills at age 10 also predict mental health and satisfaction in later life more reliably than cognitive skills (Goodman et al 2015). Moreover, reinforcing their importance, a correlation has also been found between these attributes and educational attainment (Durlak et al 2011; Heckman & Kautz 2013; Barker et al 2014). Heckman and Kautz (2013) amongst others refer to the Big Five character attributes (OCEAN): openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism (emotional stability). While some may be more stable personality dimensions, others encompass more malleable competencies: self-perception, social skills, motivation, perseverance, resilience, creativity and metacognition that can be modified by appropriate learning opportunities (Gutman & Schoon 2013).

SENSE OF PLACE AND PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIOUR

Finally, children who spend time outdoors are more likely to be aware of their place in the ecology of the world. If they are able to appreciate how they play an important role in acknowledging and valuing the environment, its effect on their own health and well-being and also on other human and non-human entities as an integrated living system; then they are more likely to be active citizens and environmental stewards in their present and future lives (Chawla & Cushing 2007; Malone 2013). Overall, evidence around the world continues to build that children's engagement with natural environments improves their health and ecological literacy and sustainability learning, and yet these opportunities are being reduced dramatically. As children's lives become less active and school programs channel children from outdoor play environments and into buildings (Malone & Somerville 2015)....



HOW DO KEY RESEARCH THEMES INFORM POLICY AND VICE VERSA?

The Framework developed by the Singapore Ministry of Education (Fig. 1) for outdoor learning is a useful starting point to think about structuring the evidence presented in this report around student competencies and desired outcomes, particularly as the focus on student outcomes is not simply about academic achievements but is driven by an acknowledgement that young people need to have other skills to succeed in an increasingly globalised economy.



Figure 1: Framework for 21st Century Competencies and Student Desired Outcomes – Singapore Ministry of Education (Copyright ©2014 Ministry of Education, Singapore. All rights reserved)

The rationale supporting the Singapore model is "To better position our students to take advantage of opportunities in a globalised world, our students need to possess life-ready competencies like creativity, innovation, cross-cultural understanding and resilience. The outer ring of the framework represents the 21st century skills necessary for the globalised world we live in. These are: Civic literacy, global awareness and cross-cultural skills; Critical and inventive thinking; and Information and communication skills". Additional to these skills are core values of: Respect; Responsibility; Integrity; Care; Resilience and Harmony.

In identifying the key themes for this Pathways from Evidence to Impact report, the authors have been mindful of the rationale behind the successful Singaporean model of outdoor learning; the evidence already substantiated in previous national and international research reports and evidence based reviews of the field; and the importance of considering the uniqueness of the UK policy landscape. The authors have as the starting point a recognition of the important role children engaging in learning in natural environments could have to contributing to societal outcomes that will improve young people's capacity to be successful and productive contributors now and in their future lives. Although there is considerable debate about the importance of learning qualities other than IQ as a means for describing educational attainment and success throughout the life course (Duckworth & Yeager 2015), there is equally widespread agreement that these non-cognitive (Easton 2013), soft skills (Heckman & Kautz 2012), and 'positive personal qualities other than cognitive ability that lead to student success' (Duckworth & Yeager 2015: 239) are beneficial for learners and society. Recently, the term '21st century skills' has been adopted. While these characteristics have long been accepted as implicated in children's education and development, after decades of performative emphasis on standards in educational attainment, there has been widespread recognition that concentration on subject content alone may stifle the creative, enterprising and innovative thinking that is needed to address 21st century challenges.

The skills have been described as:

- 1. (a) conceptually independent from cognitive ability;
- 2. (b) generally accepted as beneficial to the student and to others in society;
- 3. (c) relatively rank-order stable over time in the absence of exogenous forces
- 4. (d) potentially responsive to intervention and
- 5. (e) dependent on situational factors for their expression.

(Duckworth& Yeager 2015: 239).

Our themes for desired outcomes in health, social capital and aspiration for young people are identified within the policy context of character qualities that society would seek to imbue in young people so they are future ready as successful, healthy and confident contributors in the 21st century and have been demonstrated in recent reviews as achievable through learning outside the classroom in natural environments.

The key themes and outcomes emergent from our analysis are:

- Encouraging healthy bodies and positive lifestyles with a desired student outcome of a *healthy* and happy body and mind;
- Developing social, confident and connected people with a desired student outcome: *a sociable confident person;*
- Stimulating self-regulated and creative learning with a desired student outcome: *a self-directed creative learner;*
- Supporting effective contributions and collaboration with a desired student outcome: *an effective contributor;*
- Underpinning care and action for others and the environment with a desired student outcome: an active global citizen

WHY ARE THESE (THEMES/OUTCOMES) IMPORTANT FOR CHILDREN IN 21ST CENTURY?

Full Report, 50 pages, available online: <u>http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/research/oelres-net</u> The report has an extensive bibliography on this neglected topic, core to a Learning Park.



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as we transition to creating an operative, prototype Learning Park. This requires travel for which we must raise an additional \$15,000. Any amount you can donate will be appreciated. The Corrales Institute is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. All contributions are tax-exempt.

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Non-profit is a negative term and tells us only what these institutions are not. But at least it shows that all these institutions, whatever their specific concerns, have something in common.... And we now begin to realize what that "something" is. It is that they do something very different from either business or government. Business supplies, either goods or services. Government controls. A business has discharged its task when the customer buys the product, pays for it, and is satisfied with it. Government has discharged its function when its policies are effective. The "nonprofit" institution neither supplies goods or services nor controls. Its "product" is neither a pair of shoes nor an effective regulation. Its product is a changed human being. The non-profit institutions are human change agents. Their "product" is a cured patient, a child that learns, a young man or woman grown into a self-respecting adult; a changed human life altogether.

— Peter F. Drucker

"Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

Margaret Mead