Colorado State Library
GRT Quick Bites
20 Minute Topics in Early Learning

Getting Back to Nature
with Melody Garcia
Your Colorado Early Literacy Support Team

Kate Brunner, Melody Garcia, and Gail Yerbic - Photo by N. Romano (2019)
Growing Readers Together & Early Childhood in Colorado

- Up to 57% of children under 6 are cared for informally by family members, friends, & neighbors (FFN caregivers).
- GRT prioritizes & supports library service to FFN caregivers.
- **GOAL:** To increase FFN’s awareness of library resources and services through outreach, community partnerships, and relationship building.
One study revealed that toddlers on average spent 3 hours a week outdoors.

- 44% never held a bug
- 35% had yet to play in the mud
- 36% had never collected sticks

Open Access News, May 2019, Independent study by Kiddi Caru, UK
https://www.openaccessgovernment.org/toddlers-outside-per-week/65586/
On average, children today spend 35% less time outdoors than their parents did.

2018 survey of children 3-12 by Kamuk Outdoor Apparel

Photo by Markus Sinske from Unsplash.
“You can’t bounce off of the walls if there are no walls.”

Erin Kenny, founder of Cedarsong Nature School

An outdoor environment:

- Increases sensory input
- Reduces stress/anxiety
- Increases focus
- Offers greater motor development options
- Enhances reasoning and observation skills
Outdoor Programming as Outreach

- Does signage inform onlookers what’s happening?
- Is there flexibility to allow latecomers to participate?
- Are you ready to welcome them?
- Do you have information on hand?
Nature play is defined by it’s unstructured and child directed interactions with natural materials and environments.

- Children play WITH nature
- Invitation to engage in guided play
- Space for invention and discovery
- Focus on sensory experiences
- Risks and messes are welcomed

The average American child spends 4 to 7 minutes a day in unstructured play outdoors

Child Mind Institute
Examples of Nature Play

- Mud and water play
- Building forest homes
- Scavenger hunts
- Potion making
- Nature faces
- Painting with nature
- Collecting nature treasures for art
- Natural science activities
  - Forces
  - Melting ice
  - Float/Sink
  - Natural engineering
  - Sound/acoustics
Including Nature Play in Storytime

Take time to notice the environment. Has anything changed?

Engage children’s senses - what can we feel, hear, smell?

Allow for discoveries in nature.

Plan themes that elicit exploration.

Include nature-based process crafts.

End storytime with an invitation to engage in nature play.
Bringing the Outside In

Sensory Tables
Process crafts with natural media (sticks, rocks, leaves, flowers, water/ice)
Walking field trip to collect nature treasures
Partner with local parks department
Creating Nature Play Spaces

- Boulders to climb
- Streams to dam
- Ponds to splash in
- Sticks and rocks for building
- Logs and rocks to practice balancing
- A multisensory garden to explore
Resources for Families:
❖ Generation Wild
❖ CO State Parks Pass
❖ And YOU!
➢ Recommend books that support nature play
➢ Create outdoor Take & Make activities
➢ Read books that show ALL children in nature

Photo by Joice Kelly on Unsplash
Thank You for Joining Us!

July 20 at 12pm MT
ABCs AND 123s! Numeracy and Early Literacy
with Kate Brunner

July 19 at 1pm MT
CLEL Member Meetup: Outdoor Programming
via Zoom- email info@clel.org for link

Contact Melody Garcia:
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We Welcome Your Input!

Please complete this short feedback survey:
https://www.surveygizmo.com/s3/4404594/GRT-Team